



A COLLECTION OF IMAGES FROM OUR DIVERSE WORLD AND TALES FROM BEHIND THE LENS

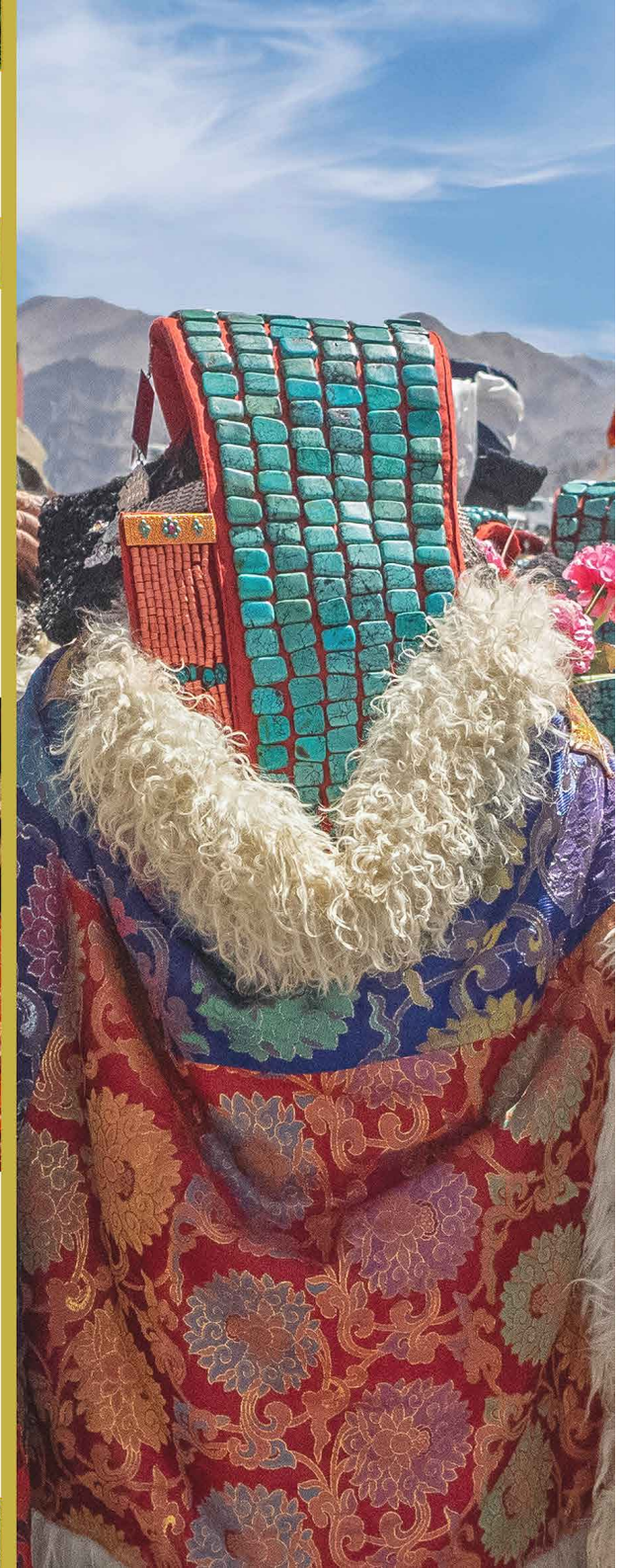


JACOB VINCENT BALL

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PHOTOGRAPHY & STORIES
FROM THE ROAD



LINKS



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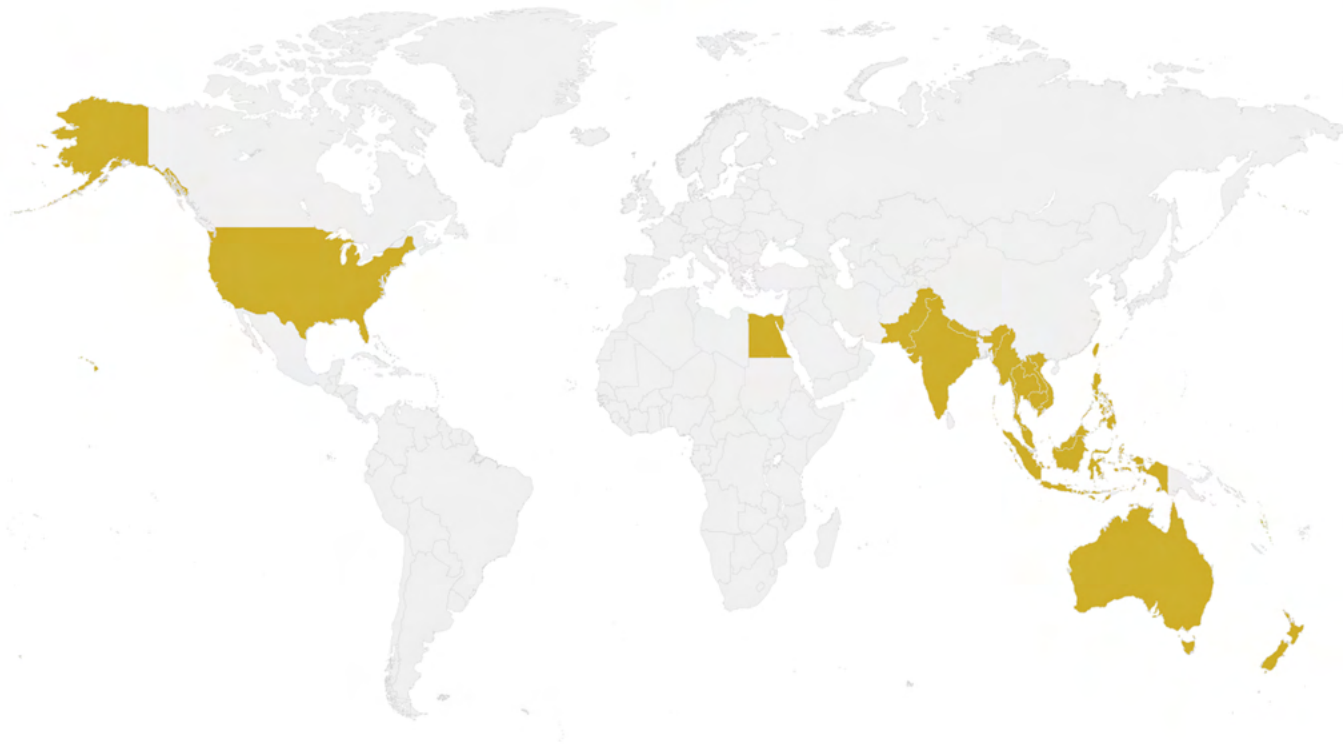
Half of the profits from this book will be donated to the C.O.P.E. Centre in LAOS.



HELPING
PEOPLE MOVE ON



2013 - 2023



PROLOGUE

From the vast wilderness to the chaotic metropolises, a tapestry of diversity woven with a billion threads, our planet is a stunning canvas of contrasting elements. From faraway lands frozen in time to just a few steps from home, there is a marvel; there is something wondrous to behold.

The barren tundra of the far North, the sun-drenched savannah of the tropics, the eternal mystery and depths of our oceans, the natural world is not only an endless source of inspiration but our key to sustaining life; it is our provider, granting its inhabitants all the elements needed to survive and thrive.

But not limited to the natural world, human civilization is a mosaic of cultures, languages and traditions hosting a kaleidoscope of customs and beliefs, all with a unique charm and varied way of living.

However, diversity is not always beautiful. It can also be ugly and unsettling, exposing deep-seated prejudices and inequalities that plague our world. From the systematic oppression of marginalized communities to the destructive impact on our natural world, our home is also a place of struggle and strife.

In abundance, uncontrollable woe to insuppressible hope.

Ultimately, the true beauty of our planet lies not in aesthetics but in its capacity to bring us together. To remind us how similar, at our core, we all are and that we are all part of a global community where our differences shouldn't divide us but enrich us.

A short-term friend on a long journey, a conversation and selfie with some curious locals, or an invitation to share a meal around a family table. We all smile when joyful; we all cry when woeful; we're all just doing the best we can.





To display our world's plethora of **CONTRAST** the following contents are in no particular order:

2013 to 2023

United States of America
Thailand
The Philippines
New Zealand
Thailand II
Indonesia
Malaysia
Thailand III
Nepal & The Himalayas
India
Pakistan
Cambodia
Thailand IV
Alaska & The Arctic Circle
Hawaii
Vietnam
New Zealand II
Vanuatu
Myanmar
New Zealand III
Laos
Vietnam II
Tasmania
Vietnam III
Egypt
Ladakh & Little Tibet
Australia

Cover - Leh, LADAKH
Previous - Giza, EGYPT
Arrowtown, NEW ZEALAND
Tam Coc Provence, VIETNAM
Above - Mt Ama Dablam , The Himalayas, NEPAL

MYANMAR

Faith in an uncertain land.

A few birds quietly chirp before the rest of the world awakens. It's dark outside, the streets are empty, the world is calm.

All still rest as you steer off the pavement and onto the sand, venturing through the shrub-lined trails and focusing on the singular light from your handlebars. You squint in defence as insects take flight at this early hour and, with you, seek a place to see in the new day.

The pre-dawn light grows in shades of white and blue, silhouetting the hundreds of ancient temples that have scattered the plains of Bagan for thousands of years. Yet all detail is still hidden in the dark.

Once arrived, the only sound is the shuffling of bare feet on stone, and as you enter the calm dark temple, you gaze high at an authoritative stone Buddha that sits carved by hand and faith. The soft orange glow of flame flickers around its features as you are not the first to enter at this early hour.

Seeking the narrow steps that lead into its upper regions, the way is illuminated by candlelight as you crouch down onto your knees, navigating the tiny passage that ascends to an open terrace.

Now, facing East, one by one, orange pillars illuminate the land's expanse, reaching high above the tree line in a sea of wonder. The fiery glow casts out all shadows; with this, the surrounding plains begin to wake in the light of a new day.





Yangon, MYANMAR

Buddhism pervades every aspect of Burmese life, and the religion has more of a hold on the nation of Myanmar than any other in the world. Filled with temples, monasteries and monks, even the poorest villages maintain a temple and have a religious community. A proverb states, "To be Burmese is to be Buddhist".

Its devotees place this before many other aspects of life, even those such as basic needs, and although the nation of Myanmar is quickly evolving away from past decades of oppression and extreme poverty, children still face tough lifestyles in such a socially and financially challenged nation. Adding to this, many are born into an endless cycle of poverty, abuse, corruption and a broken system that narrows their hope to only a few paths. One is the path of religion.

Shinbyu, the initiation ceremony, marks the transition from worldly to spiritual. Here, the head is shaved, a robe received, and then life at a monastery for several weeks, months, or years begins. This opportunity to be provided with some purpose and maybe for the first time in their lives comfort is a path that many young Burmese take as it is if only temporarily, a path to a better life.

Pictured:

A young monk rests outside on the steps of a monastery. His scars and tattoo display a tough story for such a young life, and adjusting to religion is just as bewildering.





Yangon, MYANMAR
The sour stench of rotting rubbish attacks the nostrils even from a distance as young monks participate in Soji by cleaning and maintaining the monastery and its grounds after morning prayer in the bustling alleyways of the ever-expanding capital.



Harding Ice Field, ALASKA

Yangon, MYANMAR

Myanmar's unofficial capital is by far the most exciting place in the country to be right now; as former political exiles, foreign investors and distant adventurers flock, Yangon reflects the changes that have occurred since the government reopened.

Though in some ways, Yangon has held still, as the city remains focused on its faith, as devotion to Buddhism in this country is one of the most committed in the world.

The importance of paying respects to Buddha is above many other aspects of people's lives, as it is believed that with faithful worship, everything else will fall into place.



Thiksey Monastery, LADAKH

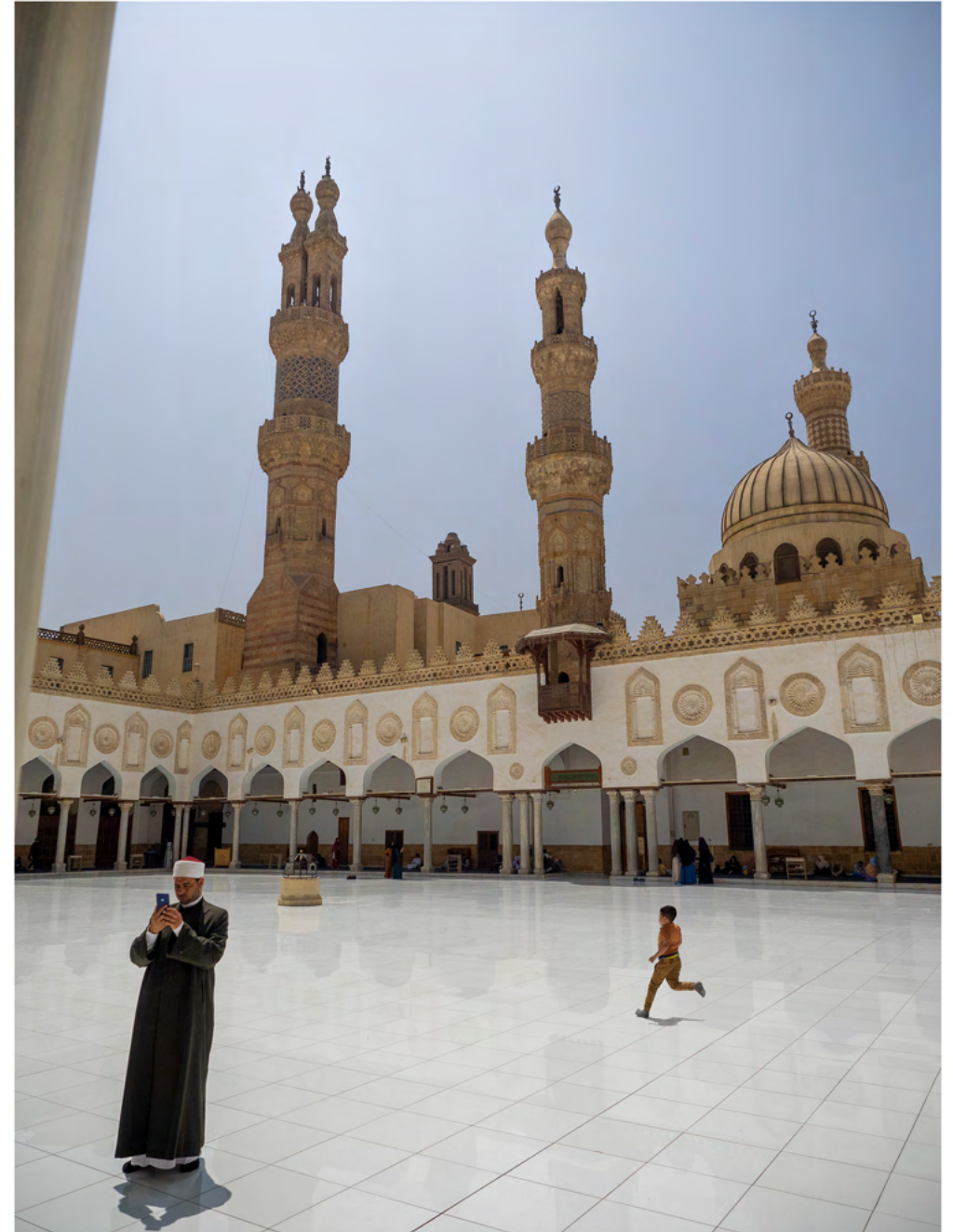
Standing as a sentinel, a colossal statue of Maitreya Buddha radiates serenity and peace carved by hands long ago.

Cairo, EGYPT

In this juxtaposition of youthful exuberance and ancient architecture, the Al Azhar mosque is a harmonious convergence of the past and the present. Its majestic and imposing minarets serve not only as architectural marvels but also as conduits of spiritual connection, invoking a sense of reverence that resonates through the heart of Cairo's vibrant soul.

Pictured:

Children run across the scorching white marble as out of towers take selfies in front of the massive





Ladakh, INDIA

In the 1950s, China's assertion of control over Tibet sparked unrest, leading to a spiritual and cohesive suppression during the 1959 Tibetan Uprising. Many Tibetans, including His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, fled their homeland, braving treacherous mountain passes and enduring harsh conditions to reach safety and freedom.

For the Chinese Tibetans, the path to Ladakh was a daunting trek across the Himalayas, a journey of weeks, if not months, on foot. They faced hunger, cold, and the constant threat of danger from nature and human adversaries. Yet, driven by the hope of finding refuge in a land with deep cultural ties to Tibet, they pressed on.

Upon reaching Ladakh, these refugees found a community that welcomed them, drawn together by shared Buddhist traditions and a history intertwined with not just religion but the importance of all life.

Honolulu, HAWAII





Jodhpur, INDIA

The sun sets behind the giant Mehrangarh Fort located in the state of Rajasthan. The ancient site was built around 1459AD and towers 125 meters over the Blue City of Jodhpur.

Getting there requires navigating through a labyrinth of tiny streets, all of which tightly compacted buildings are painted blue to differentiate class amongst the people, whilst macaque monkeys jump overhead from house to house.

Once up close, damage from cannonballs fired by attacking armies can still be seen imprinted in its stone walls from hundreds of years ago.

This region, with its ancient ruins, old architecture, rich history, scorching heat, romantic desert backdrop, spicy foods, friendly people and abundant wildlife, make it one of, if not the best place in the world to explore.



Tu Hieu Pagoda, VIETNAM

On the outskirts of Hue township, a local lady volunteers at a small Buddhist monastery that houses around 60 monks.

Her smiles are abundant as she feels all the karma she is building up in this life will be rewarded in the next while she spends her days maintaining the gardens surrounding the ancient site built in 1843.



Ha Giang Province, VIETNAM

To rest rattled bones, shaken from rugged paths, carved precariously into the limestone mountains.

They seem endless in their ascent to the clouds.

Up here, distance is hard to gauge as your eyes, not used to such a spread of space, take some time to focus, gazing for kilometers into the depths of the valleys below and miles across vast gorges to view the towering mountains of China's Yunnan Province.

Across this terrain, dotted with minority villages, daily routines are engaged in the soil, rivers and earth, which provide the essentials through what is offered by the natural world and procured in long days of hard work.

Among this work, a Hmong family's homestay, filled with the earthy fragrance of fresh timber and a dusting of smoke wafting from the kitchen where the harvest smolders away. All this, recently built and brewed to accommodate a trickle of travelers in hopes of a brighter future after years of quiet roads and empty seats.

Plans in these parts inevitably dissolve as some form of gravity pulls you to where you should be – in the orange glow, among strangers, sharing bowls of goodness around the family table.



The bright lights.

"As the sun sets over Kuala Lumpur, the skyscrapers light up in a symphony of neon, creating a striking canvas of urban beauty. Amidst this wonderland, the Petronas Towers stand tall, reflecting the radiance of the setting sun and igniting the evening."

That's when the pavement comes alive.

MALAYSIA

In the city's depths, markets boom in a riot of sound and activity. The air is thick with the scent of fragrant spices, flowing conversations and sizzling street food as vendors and visitors alike bask in the electric glow.

Life here simply pulsates with energy".

From Kuala Lumpur's bustling streets to its dense rainforests and tranquil corners of Melaka's ancient temples, Malaysia's varied landscapes, be they natural or not, offers an enchanting glimpse into the small but captivating nation of South East Asia.



Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA
Three generations of smiles.



Phuket, THAILAND

The owners and trainers break the monkey's spirits using violent methods that rely on the fear of punishment.

They force these animals into a lifetime of slavery, to be treated like a money-making objects, forcing them to perform meaningless tricks for tourists and then left isolated in a wire cage when they are not being *"used."*

Pulled around by a metal chain forcing the monkey to perform demeaning acts like lifting weights above its head, doing sit-ups, playing basketball and riding a bicycle are performed repeatedly every day in a squalid building throughout the scorching daily heat.



Mt Annapurna, NEPAL

Nestled in the heart of the Himalayas is what feels like a distant planet.

No planes fly here, and no roads lead here. It is by a simple path made visible only by the feet before yours that climb for days to the roof of our world.

Life does not thrive in this place with freezing temperatures, oxygen-thin air, snow-filled gale force winds, and complete isolation. It is only somewhere we venture when it calls for us, that is, if you choose to answer.

Here, it is to gaze upon with true wonderment, the kind that runs narrow as years pass; it is to feel an overwhelming self-realisation of our own insignificance in the face of such gargantuan might, yet reaffirms us what a miracle we genuinely are.



Da Nang, VIETNAM

Outside of the modern metropolis that is Da Nang, fishermen of Man Thai Village quicken their pace back to the shore as once clear skies with soft pillows of blue and white hastily fade into gravel grey weighted stone, blotting out the light and dispersing life from the streets to the shelters.

The imminent threat of the monsoon begins to gather in the sky.



Luang Prabang, LAOS

An elderly lady gathers palm berries that have fallen on the side of the jungle-clad Mekong River. She boils them in their skins for a few hours, peels them, removes the stone and then sells them for a snack with salt and lemon.

In a country where financial hardship is in abundance, her choice has been to embrace the simple life and be truly happy rather than chase the ghost of financial freedom.



On the golden roads.

"The narrow street was shrouded in a veil of hazy smoke, accumulated from palm leaves smouldering on the edge of The Mekong, its muted tones a canvas of quiet mystery as first light beamed through the foliage."

Tasks of the day began, unsettling the stillness.

The sweeping of stone, the low hum of a scooter, the only sounds that carried down the paths echoing off the pastel walls of colonial buildings draped with aged and worn, but indescribably beautiful.

A new day in a place of hidden secrets and untold stories, waiting to be uncovered by those patient enough to venture deep into its enigmatic depths."

Nestled within this heart of South East Asia lies the captivating land of Laos.





Vientiane, LAOS

Amidst the serene backdrop of Vientiane, a jarring scene unfolds – a young monk-in-training exhibits a rare display of aggression towards another. This glimpse into the evolving dynamics of monastic life in Laos reflects the shifting currents of tradition and modernity.

In bygone days, a revered rite of passage beckoned almost every young Laotian man to the tranquil embrace of a monastery.

There, they embarked on a quest for self-discovery and enlightenment, guided by the teachings of Buddha. Some found their calling in this spiritual pursuit, dedicating their lives to the monastic path. Yet, the tide of modernity has ushered in transformative waves, reshaping the age-old practice.

The motivations behind a young Laotian's decision to embrace monastic life have become increasingly nuanced. While spiritual enlightenment continues to beckon a handful, familial tradition and short-term economic gains cast their shadows. Temples, once hailed as *"Universities of Peace,"* now face a crossroads, as archaic beliefs clash with contemporary values. The perception that women must be reborn as men to attain nirvana and the sight of monks succumbing to worldly temptations have chipped away at their revered image.

Furthermore, a phenomenon dubbed *"Monk Tourism"* has emerged, as some individuals exploit Buddhism's emblematic allure to capitalize on the influx of tourists. Amidst these complexities, a disconcerting undercurrent of micro-violence surges, staining the tapestry of monastic life. Acts of aggression towards street animals, visitors, and even fellow monks raise troubling questions about the evolving ethos within the monastic community.



Phonsavan, LAOS

"Rab riam ntaus tau zoo nkauj los txiav thiab hlais tsis tau nqaij. Yuav tsum muab hov ntawm lub zeb ho".

"The knife made by the blacksmith is very beautiful, but will not cut unless the blade is tempered and sharpened"

This Laos proverb conveys that the beauty of youth may be pleasing to the eye, but utility, like wisdom or knowledge, lies in unseen values that have been developed through experiences.

Pictured: An elderly Hmong woman spends her time in front of her daughter's small store.



On the Mekong River, LAOS

Laos claims the most significant stretch of this vital waterway among the countries it winds through. The Mekong's importance to the nation is so profound that the broad blue stripe adorning the Laos Flag symbolises this majestic river.

In a land where good roads are a rarity, where monsoon rains frequently inundate the landscape, and where rugged mountains dominate the terrain, the Mekong River assumes a role of paramount significance. It serves as Laos' essential lifeline, facilitating transportation and communication while sustaining the nation's very livelihood.



Luang Prabang, LAOS

Every morning in the UNESCO-protected town of Luang Prabang, Buddhist monks dressed in vivid saffron-coloured robes quietly exit the Monasteries and collect offerings from devout Buddhists along the streets.

The alms-giving ceremony, or Tak Bat, is a longstanding tradition in Laos Buddhist culture and a sacred ceremony for the locals and the monks who depend on these offerings (often homemade sticky rice) for sustenance during the day. The ritual is conducted in complete silence at sunrise.

Ban Naxom Village, LAOS
A father and son who
work the rice paddies
outside the village of Ban
Naxom plant at sunrise
and sunset to avoid the
scorching midday heat.

For kilometres, as far as
the eye can see, it is all
planted and picked by
hand.





The Southern Alps, NEW ZEALAND
It's all here: spectacular glaciers, picturesque fiords, rugged snowy mountains, vast plains, rolling hillsides, subtropical forests, crystal clear lakes, volcanic plateaus and miles of coastline with gorgeous sandy beaches.

Embedded deep within the heart, looking out over the Alps continues to evoke the same awe-inspiring wonder as that very first visit years ago.



Cairo, EGYPT

The Mosque-Madrassa of Sultan Hasan. Built in 1356.

Ha Giang, VIETNAM

In the courtyard of Ty Ta Thi Homestay, Friday evening unfolds with a celebration of life and community. Locals, dressed in their traditional best, gather around a communal table fashioned from rough-hewn timber and dotted with freshly harvested food from the gardens around back.

As each new visitor arrives, smiles light up the gathering. They bring not only dishes overflowing with hand picked goodness and homemade spirits but admiration for the intricately patterned garments worn with pride by all.

In this rustic setting, laughter dominates, and under the canopy of a starlit sky, there's a palpable sense of pure joy, with garnishes of heart and soul.



Luang Prabang, LAOS





Hemis Monastery, LADAKH

As night embraces the Himalayan sanctuary, a monk seeks solace within the confines of his simple chamber, resting upon a mat of reed and a pillow of humility.

Lulled by a symphony of breeze passing through corridors and the distant hymns from within the temple, he drifts, traversing the internal landscape of thoughts, where realities meld with the ineffable, where the temporal and the eternal intertwine.

It is a life enshrined in simplicity and spiritual seeking for those who dare to traverse the ethereal peaks of the mind.



Aswan, EGYPT

In the South of Egypt, inside a vintage French taxi, a Sudanese driver smokes British cigarettes while outside, a barrage of noise, clutter and chaos is only exceeded by the scorching heat that melts the pavement on the streets of the Nile-lined city.

Negotiations for the simplest of transactions become intricate dances, where the price of a journey may involve more twists and turns than the route itself.

So if you don't accept the proposed price, neither will your counterpart and the endless haggle begins. Even after, you may end up at a distant relative's store for a "look" at his wares or be told at the destination that "local tax" wasn't included in the agreed price.

As savvy or experienced as you think you are, there is always a plot twist as to why, once again, you must reach into your pocket. But in the end, more often than not, there's a grin, a nod, and a handshake (sometimes even a shared coffee) to clear the air in agreement that the "agreement" is complete.



Java, INDONESIA

Hours by train, absorbing the external.

"Poverty-stricken encampments strewn across the blistering rocks of a modernized city trail into rural communities with garnishes of colonial architecture. Brief pauses in momentum brewing interactions with offerings of Java Coffee from a local vendors pot, a beautiful smile from a stranger, or a cheeky tongue poke from a youngster."

Though windows, beautiful or bleak, warmth flows as passengers drift away to the pulse of the tracks, **witnessing tiny fragments of a thousand lives.**



Banda Aceh, INDONESIA

In 2004, the ocean unleashed a cataclysmic surge that travelled kilometres inland, leaving in its wake a devastating torrent of destruction that obliterated everything that stood.

Sixty children and teachers lost their lives at this site in a small town of around 680 people. It has since been rebuilt, but with financial aid barely materializing into physical help and the memories of the loss simply too raw for the community, it has since crept back into abandonment.

Years on, the people and the landscape have mostly healed, but just a short walk down an overgrown gravel road, there sits crumbling relics of one of the largest natural disasters in human history.

EGYPT

Defining time itself.

In the North Eastern corner of the African continent, time whispers tales through ancient stones, standing as relics and echoing the grandeur of a bygone era. Even the ground is laced with footprints of pharaohs and those who chiselled their dreams into the towering pyramids, temples, and tombs that grace the landscape.

Yet, as the sands of time have swept onward, Egypt's fate has evolved. Today, it stands not at a crossroads but beyond, a land where the pendulum has swung, burdened by the weight of unparalleled overpopulation. The once-resplendent wonders now find themselves amidst the bustle of urban complexity, an ocean of lives exceeding the limits of infrastructure.

Just as the pharaohs nurtured dreams that transcended their time, modern Egyptians aspire to bridge the gap between their illustrious heritage and the untrodden path ahead. Balancing tradition and progress, they pay homage to their forebears while forging a passage to tomorrow, for Egypt is more than a relic frozen in history's embrace. It is a living embodiment, a dynamic force navigating the currents of change.

In its narrative, we glimpse reflections of our own voyage — one marked by choices and challenges, growth and resilience. Beyond the struggles that beset the present lies an unwavering resolve to shape a better destiny. Just as the Nile winds its course through the heart of Egypt, so does the river of human aspiration, flowing through the collective spirit, optimistically driving this timeless land and its people toward a brighter horizon.



The Giza Plateau, EGYPT
The great pyramids birthed some 4500 years ago are undoubtedly one of the most incredible sights one can gaze upon.

They are enigmatic marvels that have baffled the most remarkable minds across eons, and despite the passage of time, the intricacies of their creation remain a mystery, a testament to the ingenuity and craftsmanship of ancient hands.

The pyramids, once symbols of grandeur and splendour during the era of the illustrious Pharaohs, now stand against a backdrop of smog and urban chaos. The remnants of their former glory are veiled by pollution, and the surrounding landscape is marred by a sea of rubbish and persistent peddlers.

But if you take the time to venture out and find a quiet place among the dunes, far away from the chaos, you can still sit in wonder and awe, absorbing one of humankind's most outstanding achievements.

Under the blistering sun, it was one fine day.

Cairo, EGYPT

"It's 9am in the massive halls of the Rifa'i Mosque, and it's strangely empty. There are no calls to prayer, worshipers, tourists and, most notably, no sound. A silence so loud you can hear the ringing in your ears derived from the chaotic streets ventured to reach this place.

Walking deeper into its grand halls, faint noises begin creeping through the silence, its origins uncertain as it echoes softly and carries up beyond the massive ceilings.

Then through the darkness, an outline of a person, dormant, still and unresponsive to my approach. In silence, one moves in and the creator of the ambient noise becomes clear. With head and hands against the maqsurah, facing Mecca, prayers are spoken in almost tongues, as words and sentences blend.

In silence, my presence is unnoticed, while relentless devotion is witnessed".





Aswan, EGYPT

Nestled within the alleyways of Aswan, the ancient souks (markets) beckon with an irresistible charm and intensity – a treasure trove for the consumer. These vibrant hubs pulse with the energy of daily life, offering a glimpse into the city's history.

In a landscape where supermarkets are a rarity and extravagance, these markets, where "the camel butcher" holds court, cater to the diverse needs of the local populace, serving as a one-stop emporium, and although not a highlight on most menus in the country, it is a staple that has its place in the family dinner rotation, that being the meat of camel.



Dahab, EGYPT

In a captivating display at the nexus of natural forces, the "Magic Lake" lives up to its name by vanishing under the scorching sun, only to defy its disappearance each night.

Its revival is orchestrated through a subterranean aquifer hidden beneath the blue clay earth. As night descends, the aquifer replenishes the lake, showcasing an enchanting cycle of nature's artistry and rejuvenation.



مقابلة



Ban Nampe Region, LAOS
Daughters, Mother and Grandmother.
 Three generations on their way to the families' rice fields for harvest.



Bagan, MYANMAR
 He lives among the temples of Bagan as his family has called this place home for hundreds of years and claims ownership of the lands around a particular temple.

Daily, he leads a simple life by gardening, sweeping, caring for his dogs, and sometimes offering a puff on his cigar to travelers passing through.



Milford Sound, NEW ZEALAND

Even on cold, dark and rainy days, enormous nature like this is a memento that we are a wonder even with all our flaws. Alive on an unpredictable planet.

It reminds us to slow down, be more tolerant and caring, and if you feel the weight of this bewildering and frantic modern world, go outside, seek no final answer.



Cat Ba Island, VIETNAM

A bay of variance with concrete towers gradually scaling further up the mountains to meet the demand of the ever-expanding tourism sector, all lined in sync boasting fresh paint, wifi and an army of air-conditioners.

The streets below, filled with restaurants to lure the Western palate, see the once charming and rugged island now a bustling tourism mecca and "must see" on the Northern route.

Yet just a skip across the water, age-old methods are still practised to produce a staple used in dishes for hundreds of years, the aromatic yet pungent fish sauce. Here, rugged junk boats grace the water while hundreds of vintage ceramic pots line the harbour, filled and resting on crumbling brickwork, while the patient practice of fermentation takes place to produce an income for the humble locals in this timeless fishing port.



Luang Prabang, LAOS

The people of Laos are kind, generous and inclusive souls who are quick to laugh and tend to prioritize friends, family and some good food over life's more mundane responsibilities.

Perhaps that's why the smiles are abundant, as even the shyest young child peeking out from behind their mother has a cheeky grin.

Time spent meeting, greeting and getting to know someone is never rushed here and never do you feel intrusive on someone's time; they even seem to slow down the process as to enjoy the whole experience of meeting someone new with unbroken eye contact, a smile and an openness to strangers that is so refreshing you can't help but smile back.

More so than the incredible natural sights, adventurous days, rich history or joyful encounters, it's the small conversations with the people that make us feel, even if brief, a calming connection.

AUSTRALIA



The homelands.

As you traverse this rugged land, expanses of red earth are only matched in size by vast oceans, both stretching out in seemingly infinite breadth and beauty.

Above, our clear skies offer an ever-changing canvas of light, from the fiery hues of sunset and the luminous glow of star-studded nights to the concrete lanterns of our ever-expanding skylines.

In our cities, modernity seems boundless as growth has never seen such force, and with this, a sense of urgency permeates the air. But amongst these bustling streets, dreams of a better life are chased and built, as many, in the land of opportunity seek out a quality of life vastly different from those on offer around the world.

Still, what is only a stone's throw away sit formations of natural labour, created over vast millennia, punctuating the landscape and speaking to the timelessness of this ancient continent, standing as testaments to where we all once came and shall eventually return.



Uluru, AUSTRALIA

Uluru stands as a colossal sentinel in the heart of Australia's Red Centre, its ancient, rust-colored expanse a testament to the profound relationship between the land and its people.

For the non-Indigenous, land may be seen as a commodity, an asset to be bought, sold, and profited from, or simply a place to call home. But for the Indigenous people, the connection is far deeper, rooted in a spiritual symbiosis that transcends mere ownership. Here, the land owns them, intertwining with every aspect of their lives, infusing their existence with a timeless sense of belonging.



Murwillumbah, AUSTRALIA



Angkor Wat, CAMBODIA

Most deserving of its UNESCO World Heritage title, it combines one of the world's most stunning pieces of ancient architecture with a fascinating and rich history. You can see why thousands flock here to revel in the masterpiece that is the epicentre of the Angkor Kingdom.

Rent a bike, take your time, head away from the crowds and lead yourself down one of the many overgrown trails to find your own quiet piece of this Khmer paradise.



The Ganges, Uttar Pradesh Region, INDIA

On the outskirts of many towns along the river system that stretches 2,500km from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal, scores of decaying bodies surface, especially so in the Indian region of Uttar Pradesh.

Rather than being thoroughly cremated into fine ash and then spread into the river to follow the Hindi tradition, many are given water burials as families cannot afford the timber to properly burn the body.

It's easy to spot these remains as many are in plain sight next to where thousands of Hindus bathe daily in ritual purification or simply look a bit closer at what the crows, vultures and dogs are so interested in.

Even with the introduction of flesh-eating turtles into the river system by the local government, all current methods have failed, and deadly viruses continue to travel down stream into reservoirs used for drinking, cooking and everyday use by millions.

Despite the river's important role in Hinduism, which the majority of the 1.3 Billion population follows, it constantly is tainted by industry, and the settlements along its banks are to suffer as the clear waters from the Himalayas turn into a murky, frothy and brown wasteland, bordering on toxic.

Khe Sanh Military Base, VIETNAM

"It was very confusing not knowing who was actually fighting who. You could never trust anyone or believe what they were saying."

The Americans fought the North Vietnamese, who fought the Australians, who fought the Pathet Lao, who fought the Montagnard, who fought the nationalist militias, who fought the Catholic militias, who fought the Viet Cong, who fought the South Koreans, who were bombed by the North Koreans, who helped the Khmer Rouge, who fought the French, who bribed the sects, who betrayed the gangsters, who also fought the Americans.

Words of an innocent caught in the middle.



Leh, LADAKH

By the thousands, clapping in the winds roaring off the Tibetan plateau and over the Himalayas, prayer flags are strung high above the township of Leh, offering prayer and protection to its residents.

In India, the Northern state of Ladakh is reached by passing over the Himalayas and onto the plains that make up part of the Tibetan/Chinese plateau. Straddling the border with China, it was a point of mass exodus for Monks and Buddhists from Tibet during the Chinese invasion as freedom, and safe passage were offered from India during this period. Thousands of Buddhists journeyed to practice their religion of peace, in peace.

The isolation of this area itself offers immense solitude as outside of the small townships that lie deep in the valleys, nothing but snow-covered peaks and traitorous gravel roads dot the landscape, leading to monasteries and stupas deep within the world's highest mountains.



Cairo, EGYPT

A worshiper at the elaborate tomb of Sultan Hussein Kamel of Egypt (1853–1917), located in the Rifa'i Mosque. Amidst the grandeur, he offers prayer, a testament to a connection that defies temporal confines.



The Himalayas, NEPAL
The highest peaks that live above the clouds.

Lung Cam Village, VIETNAM

In the ancient Hmong home of Pao, timeless pillars crafted of timber and hand have strong held a roof for multiple generations. From farmers and harvesters to wealthy opium traders, the passing of time has seen the once jagged stone walked smooth and barren fields now in bloom.

Inside, the ever-present warmth of home. With loved ones' pictures caringly hung on adorning walls amid such drastic changes outside of them.



Bagan, MYANMAR



New Delhi, INDIA

Cairo, EGYPT

"A wave of hums grows louder as you step within the marble pillars, a space filled with recited prayers, some whispered as head touches ground, others proud in volume, projecting praise for their god and his teachings. Eyes wander the holy enclave, then catch your own and hold in a stare, either curious or confused, as worlds away are these faces, from their own to mine".

Inside the Al Azhar mosque in the heart of the Old Cairo.





Luang Prabang, LAOS

Wat Xieng Thong Buddhist temple in the cultural capital of Luang Prabang was built in the 1560s and is the most important Monastery in all of Laos.

As a “Place”, it is significant to the spirit of religion and tradition, as stories are passed down within the country through family and abroad by all those visiting the ancient site. A constellation of individuals travelling different paths, keeping these essential histories alive as it can’t be helped wanting to share such accomplishments of wonder created hundreds of years ago.



The Himalayas, NEPAL

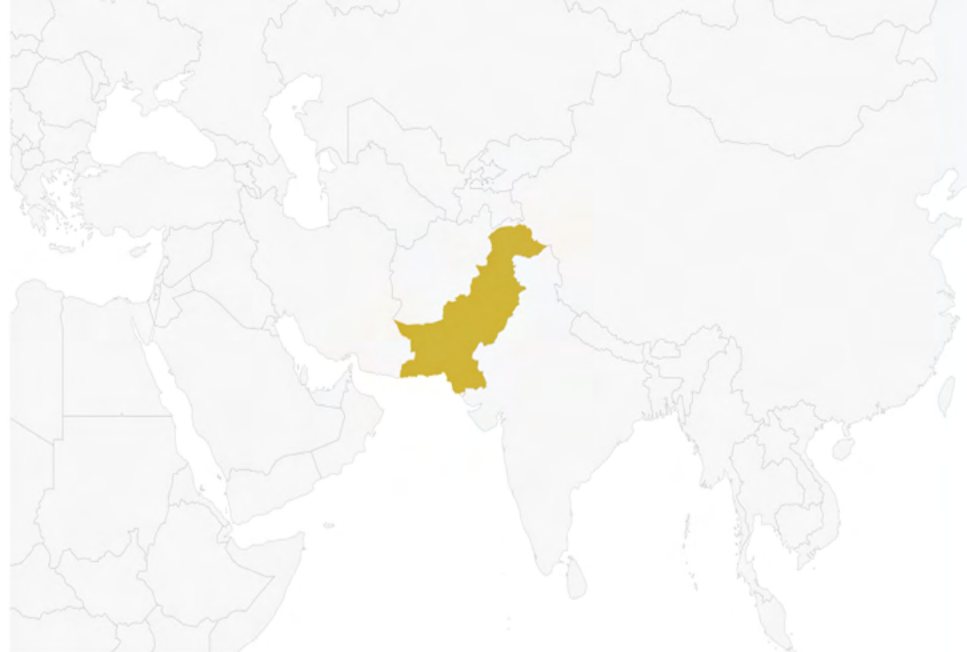
The plains of Pakistan.

A vast expanse of seemingly infinite space, where sand and dust paint the surface in an array of earthy tones.

It is a place of rugged beauty with an unyielding landscape that challenges those who venture into its depths and, even more so, for those that call it home.

Characterized by rolling dunes that rise and fall with each passing gust and peaks that grow from crumbling hues of orange into towering monoliths nestled in the clouds, these ever-moving structures are the backbone of the land.

Gazing into the distance feels like one is at the ends of the earth as the isolation, as unrelenting as the sun, beats down upon its surface, creating an environment of natural hostility, yet where life still blooms and continues to carve out its place among the dunes.



PAKISTAN



PAKISTAN

Near the Pakistan / Indian border in the Great Thar Desert, a small community exists as a speck in a vast ocean of sand that spans 200'000sq Kilometres.

Reached by camel is a simpler existence where homes are built with clay & ingenuity, and the currency, being of a physical nature, is water and livestock. These more tangible items are what determine wealth.

The community's people were beyond welcoming, and smiles came in abundance as we attempted to communicate through comical gestures.



Thar Desert, PAKISTAN

Straddling the Pakistan and Indian border is a vast world of sand, stone and earth. Homes here do not stand on concrete or steel, but mud and earth, with families that call it home co-existing together as all generations live under the same roof, evenly sharing what is earned or gained.

A place, if preferred, one would not choose to live, better yet, carve out a life as it's almost impossible to thrive with what the land here struggles to provide. But there is beauty within the vastness of its space and lack of complications, and these attributes may keep its inhabitants from straying too far.

As a country that most people are unsure of or just don't know enough about, it's unfortunate that the feeling towards something or someone so different defaults to fear, as nothing but genuine smiles, shared foods and open homes are gifted amongst the sands, no matter what little they have.

(Pictured – Passing through a small village, the locals are happy to seek interaction from a visitor. Attempting to communicate with hand motions and gestures always sees you the brunt of the joke in the best way possible)



Nam Mau Commune, Bac Kan Province, VIETNAM

The Vietnamese believe in the dead, while the occidentals believe only in death. Regarding this life as a small part of an infinitely greater whole, they embrace the entire essence of the living world by combining the past, present and future into an ever-continuance rather than a simple beginning and end.

"Behind the main house is a large empty room, borderline a hall, swallowed half into the surrounding mountains and jungle. The light is provided by only what sneaks through the imperfect wooden walls, with the creaking floorboards the only sound to break the immense silence.

It is still in this place and feels almost like an intrusive affair.

The cool air from the past monsoon rains is dusted with notes of burning incense as a beam of light from the opened door illuminates the only items in the completely barren room.

A photo, a candle, burning incense and a bowl of bananas.

It's a place for time with the departed, to talk, to share, or simply be with. The moments spent here are loudly amplified in a room void of any distractions".

(Pictured – A shrine to loved ones, a now elderly man rents out empty rooms of his once full house to travellers. Full of life and eagerly keen to share a whisky, he has filled space in his life with the company of strangers who seek the warmth of a home on the road).

Harding Ice Field, ALASKA.



Mekong Delta, VIETNAM

She has grown up on the river, and the Mekong has given her all the means to make a living. Her small boat produces the family's income and is made via *"taxi boat service"*, shuttling locals and travellers around the river. She also sells fruit at the floating markets when her husband is not fishing or transporting fuel along the intricate system of small canals.

On a short 6-kilometre trip together up the Mekong from one town to another, we had to stop around 8 times to cut the engine, lift the heavy metal beam out of the water and, in a frustrating entanglement, remove plastic bags off the propellor.

The Mekong River is a ginormous river system passing through several countries: Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. A body of water is so vast that people for generations felt their impact could never disrupt the *"Mighty Mekong"*, as it is described in various stories from different cultures. But today, one thing has become inevitable, the level of pollution in this system that millions of people's lives depend on has become unmanageable and, unfortunately, irreversible.

Chemical and waste runoff from ever-growing commercial production combined with a never-ending amount of single-use plastics feed into the river daily. The lack of waste management infrastructure which has been neglected by governments, has seen the ecosystem of the river in the past 50 years go from being labelled *"Healthy & Flourishing"* to today, in some parts, *"Toxic & Unsafe"*.





ตัดกัน



Kennicott, ALASKA

Wrangell—St Elias National Park is a staggering 13 million acres of pure wilderness, encompassing unexplored forests, massive snow-capped peaks, and huge expansive glaciers.

This abandoned copper mine sits alone, perched up in the clouds, with the only way to reach it being a strenuous hike through the elements of thick fog, grey clouds and unpredictable snowfall. As the snow line is reached, the howling wind tears across the surrounding peaks and provides the soundtrack for the first glimpse of the eerie structure, laying dormant above the snow-filled valleys.

Through the passing mist, its size is revealed, and the true extent of its haunted lore felt as some people have reported hearing disembodied voices and moans from within the tunnels that lead deep into the mountain. If frequently explored, one might ignore such speculations, but most days, especially in weather like this, there is not another soul around for miles.

Mining over a hundred years ago was extremely hazardous at best, and coupled with the brutal elements of the North, many lives came to an untimely end in search of riches at this very spot.



Ninh Binh Province, Cúc Phương National Park, VIETNAM

The grottos of Tam Coc are lined with dramatic limestone mountains that rise high above fertile rice paddies and intricate waterways in which the local women in traditional conical hats row colourful boats by foot down the Ngo Dong River.

The “boat-women” cup their feet and toes around the ends of the oars to steer and control the motion as they become expert rowers in the tourist season to produce an income outside the harvests.

Thiksey Monastery, LADAKH

As the sun begins its mesmerising descent behind the Himalayan peaks, a breathtaking spectacle unfolds at the Thiksey Monastery.

The golden hues of twilight embrace the ancient structure, casting a warm, ethereal glow upon its timeworn walls. The gentle chant of a monk circling the stupas reverberates in the air, harmonising with the whispers of the wind that carries the scent of blossoming pines from the valley below.

High above the world, its weathered stones, steeped in centuries of history, exude a sense of wisdom and calm that stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of life.

"In a fleeting moment, time rests in ambience, yet with the certainty that these flags will dance, the years hasten their pace, and we too shall journey as these winds do, over the mountains and into the ether of memory, floating across the vast plains".





Hanoi, VIETNAM



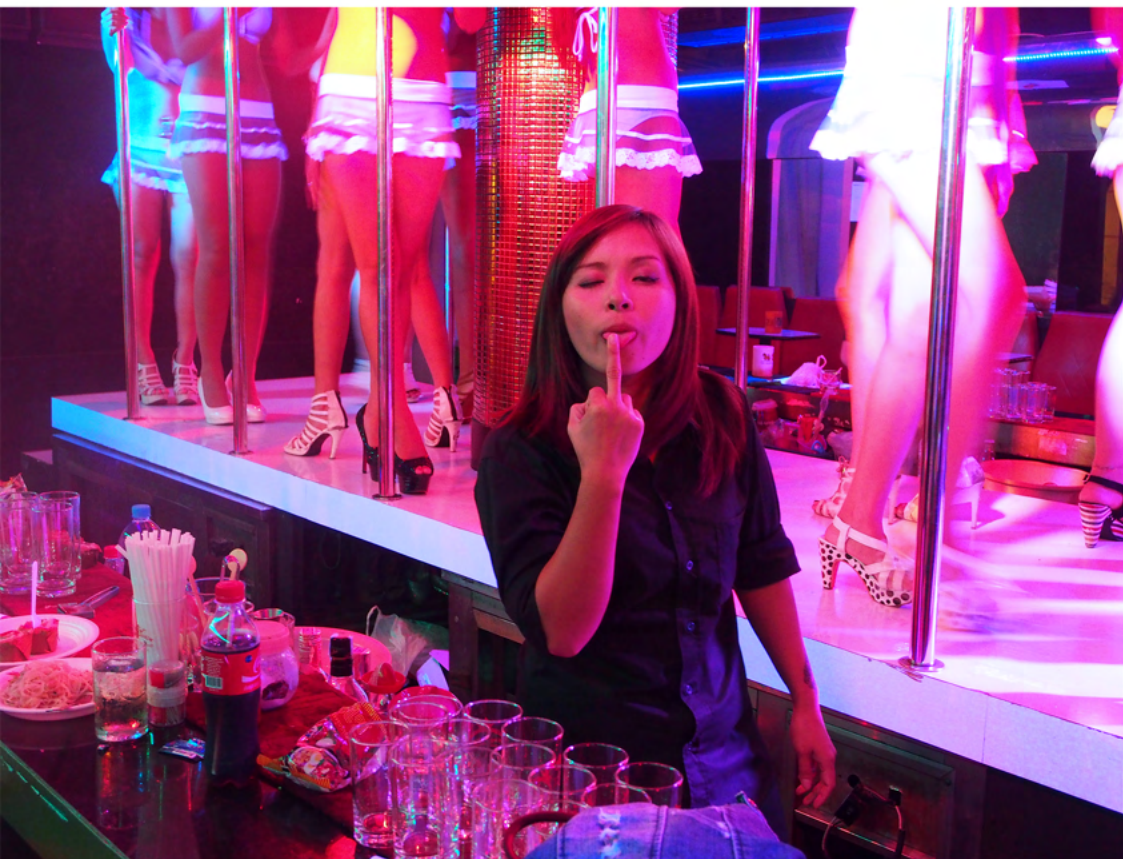
Hampi, INDIA

A peaceful moment with family as the sun fades over the ancient town of Hampi.

In 1565 Following the defeat of the glorious Vijayanagara empire, the army of the Sultanates plundered the city and reduced it to ruins, in which still remains. It's a beautiful and impressive area with extraordinary views that narrate a story of a wild past.

Agra, INDIA
The ivory mausoleum that is
the Taj Mahal.





Soi Cowboy, Bangkok, THAILAND

In 1977 Bangkok, there was only one Cowboy.

T. G. *"Cowboy"* Edwards, an American ex-airman from the Vietnam War who retired into the *"bar business"* in a low-key soi (side street) of the city. The fitting nickname *"Cowboy"* was evident. Country shirt, giant belt buckle and, of course, the hat.

This bar was not the first, but due to the economic uplift of the late '70s and the growing number of international visitors, his bar with the cheap drinks, beautiful women and "whatever happens" attitude caught the curious draw of ex-pats.

This projected the area over decades into an entertainment hotspot, and today, seeing every type of traveller, from corporate suits looking for a night to break free to families with kids walking the streets to experience the colourful spectacle of locals, backpackers, bloggers, vloggers, sex tourists, grey nomads, group tours and of course, foodies trying the abundance of street stalls specialty dishes.

Everyone the same, all drawn here to pass through and scratch that itch of curiosity.



Hampi, Karnataka State, INDIA

Hundreds of ancient stone ruins, temples, shrines and pillared halls of a grand city scatter the dry and dusty hills of the former 14th-century city destroyed in 1500 CE.

Nestled among enormous volcanic boulders and the peaceful flow of the Tungabhadra, it is to wander the sandy paths from ruin to river, immersive, drawing you back into the time of its former imperial glory.

From a hilltop plateau above the impressive Virupaksha temple, the numerous stone-carved ruins and pools are now home to the local inhabitants. Grey langur monkeys. As the sun dissipates, the sky ignites with a fire of colours stretching far and wide. Various hues of orange, red and an almost metallic gold fill your eyes as the tangerine glow warms the skin.

Amongst the silhouetted ruins, the wild inhabitants take to rest and watch it unfold with an unwavering gaze.

Kawah Ijen, INDONESIA

The miners of Ijen face a perilous journey in scorching temperatures 9000ft up to the volcano's summit, only to descend another 3000ft into its active heart.

Once there, they face a constant cloud of toxic gas, unpredictable weather, and sickness-inducing smoke, all with minimal protective gear while working 10ft away from the most acidic lake on earth. They are there to mine sulphur or the "*Devil's Gold*".

Once collected, they haul the loaded baskets on their backs, weighing on average 60kgs out of the crater up a steep rocky incline and back to the weigh station where they are paid around \$6 for the 3 to 4-hour round trip.

With very few options for income in the region, it's a stable source for the miners to see that their children receive an education so they don't have to follow in these harsh footsteps.





The Island Nation.

The clear waters lap at fresh concrete poured to meet the demands of the secret that is well and truly out regarding this paradise. Stick to the trail to find well-trodden beauty or venture down side streets to choose your own adventure. Either way, as with most places, you will see the beautiful and the bleak.

Then, sunkissed and salt logged from hours on and under the teaming waters of the jurassic landscape, stone pinnacles project afternoon silhouettes as soft patting waves on crystal white sands welcome the sunset with a burst of luminous glow that fills the landscape with spectacular colours found only in dreams.

Steamy evenings of cocktail-infused conversation and sweaty sheets shall follow.

THE PHILIPPINES

Palawan Island, THE PHILLIPINES
Unspoilt sands and azure dreams.





Yangon, MYANMAR

From 1962 to 2011, Myanmar was under strict military rule. Then, in a historic shift, a democratic civilian government took power for a decade following a landslide victory in a national election driven by citizens' aspirations for democracy. I was fortunate to travel through Myanmar during this brief period of peace.

However, in February 2021, Myanmar's military staged a coup, alleging widespread fraud in the election won decisively by the National League for Democracy. The coup reversed Myanmar's democratic progress, leading to mass communication shutdowns and violence in the streets with severe restrictions on media, internet access and freedoms. Myanmar faces a tense political and humanitarian crisis as the situation continues to unfold today.

Ha Giang, VIETNAM

Its weathered walls, adorned with photographs whisper stories of generations past and present as each picture immortalizes a memory. Smiling faces during happy times, loved ones that have passed with time, children at play among the terraces, elders with weathered hands that spoke of hard work and wisdom. The hopes of a mother as she cradles her newborn.





Saigon, VIETNAM

On the streets, hoping for passers to give a little, as the care is of her own.

Her son is mentally disabled, near blind and partially deaf, plus with his enlarged head, his neck and spine must constantly be supported. She understands him as best as she possibly can to try and give him some comfort in life, **which she clearly provides through incomprehensible love.**

A largely unknown, unaddressed post-war legacy remains in Vietnam four decades after the Vietnam War. It was heavily and repeatedly sprayed with herbicides, predominantly Agent Orange, to remove the forest cover so U.S. troops could spot the trails of the Vietcong heading South through the country.

It is highly toxic to humans because it is contaminated with a dioxin that produces numerous health problems, including cancer, mental development and birth defects. Traces remained in ecosystem, in the soil, in the plants and the fish people eat, causing issues generations later.



अंतर

New Delhi, INDIA
The city's outskirts from above push further into the dry and dusty surrounding lands.





The empire.

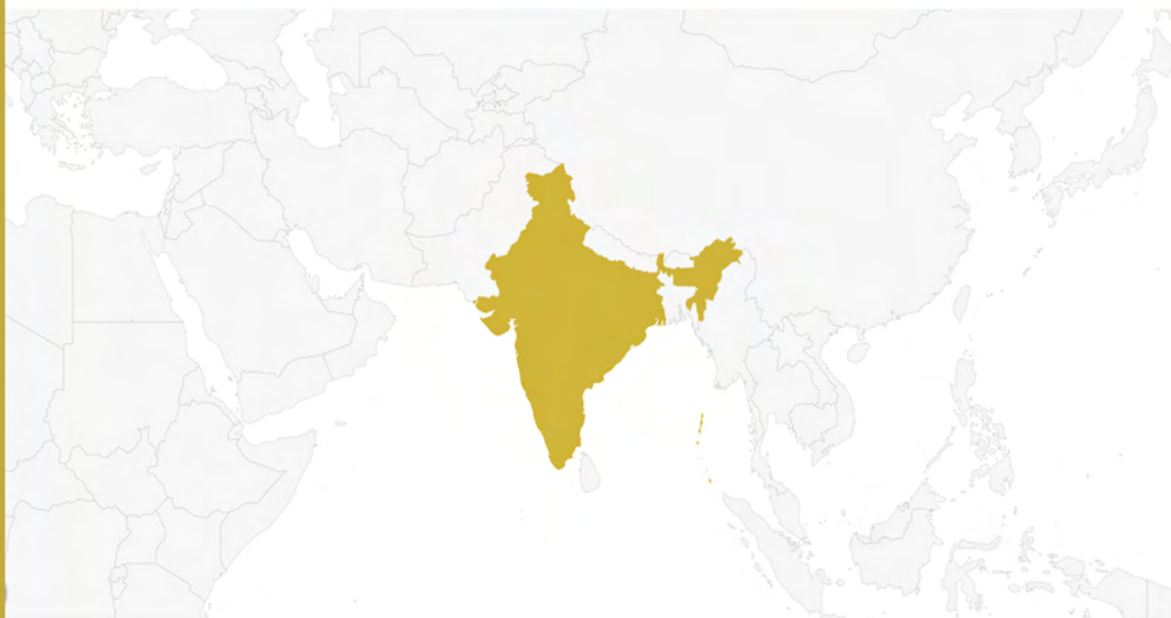
A brief descriptor to garnish one's pallet in painting this giant nation in a single stroke is impossible. It is too massive in scale, too rich in history, and diverse are its people; it just doesn't do life in moderation. And that's precisely what one will taste when you venture into its dusty golden heart. A plethora of life.

Curious eyes are followed by open doors, with plates offered carrying some of the world's most complex and flavoursome food.

As with this, its true heart beats within the people, who are as diverse and varied as the landscape. Their warmth and hospitality are legendary, a reflection of a society that values community and connection above all else.

It's a destination that demands time, patience and attention, as its many treasures, vast and varied, can take a lifetime to fully appreciate, and within these depths, a unique and undeniable way of life filled with a pulse than most nations fair to match.

For those willing to take the journey, unpacking upon return may take the rest of your life, as the rewards are truly immeasurable.



Varanasi, INDIA
Cremation pyres burn on
the banks of the Ganges.



Varanasi, INDIA

Surrounded by loved ones, an elderly woman is prepared for a traditional cremation at the burning ghats beside the river Ganges.

After the cremation, her remains are released into the river to follow the ancient Hindi tradition of a thousand years past.

Families travel from all over India to rest their loved ones at one of the country's holiest places. With the number of ceremonies so great, the burning ghats run 24 hours a day, every day of the year.



Varanasi, INDIA





Surabaya, INDONESIA

In the heart of Java, Indonesia, lies the Surabaya Zoo, a grim spectacle known colloquially as *"The Zoo of Death."* Behind its bars, a tragic and haunting nightmare unfolds for its captive inhabitants.

The extent of neglect within the zoo is an open secret, with numerous attempts to shutter its operations and relocate the suffering animals thwarted by unyielding corruption. The flow of money, tainted by the hands of corruption, serves as a powerful shield, preventing meaningful change from taking place.

Even legislative efforts to compel its closure have been futile, as the machinery of corruption ensures its doors remain open. Law enforcement itself is not immune, often swayed by underhanded dealings to turn a blind eye.

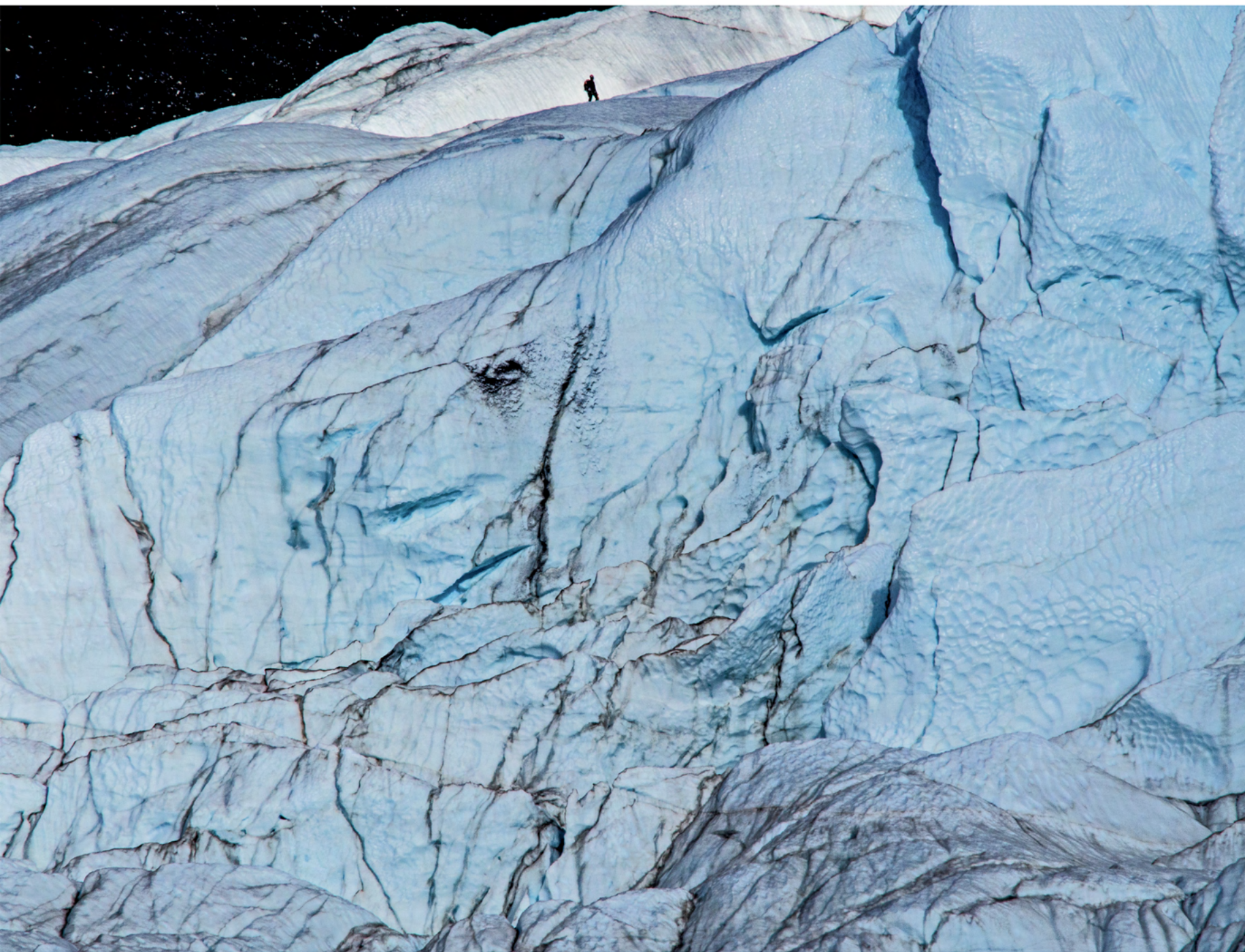
The most basic needs within the zoo's confines—proper nutrition, humane living conditions, and access to veterinary care—are cruelly absent. The grim toll is stark: an average of 25 animals succumb each month while the survivors languish, their gaunt frames and plagued existence a heartbreaking testament to their suffering.



New Delhi, INDIA

"Sweat-drenched eyes and hoofs of pooling blood await those that tread scorching paths throughout the city as the search for respite fails and becomes all but a wish for those who don't throw caution".

(Image taken in 2013. One of the hottest years ever recorded).



Matanuska Glacier, ALASKA
Its size is hard to fathom. So let that silhouette of a brave soul venturing through its valleys and peaks give you some perspective on the size of this frozen monolith.

Over its lifetime, it will travel from its origins in the highest peaks, down through the valleys cutting a path through the wilderness, melting into rivers, and eventually becoming one with the sea.

And when the grey Northern skies turn dark, it begins to voice its own language of deep cracks and guttural creaks, eventually letting out a startling crash as giant blocks of ice break free from its host.

It is a beautiful and ginormous mass of the natural world with a life cycle much like the rest of the living planet.



Cairo, EGYPT

The Great Mosque of Muhammad Ali Pasha, an architectural marvel, commands attention with its grandeur.

Five times a day, when the call to prayer is answered, hundreds flock into its corridors and halls for worship, and as pictured, many in traditional Islamic full-length Niqab Burqa, a complete body and face-covering veil, usually in black, which differs from the everyday Hijab.

"Because I choose to follow what I believe to be the most accurate interpretation of God's word, which says women who cover their faces will be rewarded in extra for fulfilling this duty".

91% of Egypt's 110 Million residents identify as Muslim.



Leh, LADAKH

Upon the arrival of a revered Dalai reincarnation, the scene unfolds with a spectacular burst of colours emanating from intricate traditional dresses. A multitude of devoted pilgrims from the neighbouring villages don these vibrant attires, forming an avenue of respect and palpable anticipation.

Their heartfelt welcome embraces his holiness, creating a truly captivating and immersive first experience as I am but only five steps outside the tiny airport wedged between The Himalayan peaks.

NEW ZEALAND

In dreams.

The natural world's inherent qualities and attributes that inspire a sense of admiration, awe, peace, gratitude and wonder are all found here.

A first glimpse of the sparkling snow-capped peaks of the Southern Alps as you head into the heart of the South Island, testing your body and mind in the freezing glacial waters around the West Coast, ascending the mountains for hours, pushing your body high up into the clouds and around countless false summits until that one last turn reveals the icy pinnacle of the landscape in Fiordland national park or ignoring time as you wander through Canterbury's heavenly grass plains that seem infinite in their reach.

Well known, but still, it can feel like a secret. Unspoilt, wild and beautiful.



Piopiotahi, NEW ZEALAND

The Māori name for Milford Sound means "*One Single Piopio*" in reference to a native bird that is long extinct.

It is believed that when the legendary Maui died during his pursuit of immortality for mankind, a single Piopio flew by the Sound in mourning.





Aswan, EGYPT



Mt Cook Region, NEW ZEALAND



Cairo, EGYPT

Within the sacred confines of the Mosque of Muhammad Ali, a natural spectacle unfolds as light pours through the stained windows during prayer, known as adhan.

This luminous phenomenon, occurring five times daily, serves as a visual call to devoted Muslims, beckoning them to partake in the obligatory act of worship and momentarily detach themselves from the affairs of the world.



Aswan, EGYPT

The ancient Egyptians possessed an unwavering reverence for the divine, with their belief system being infused within every aspect of their lives.

A pantheon of gods and goddesses guided their actions and shaped their moral and social codes. The pharaoh, revered as the earthly representative of the gods, ruled with divine authority and brought a sense of unity to the realm. This spiritual connection fostered a cohesive society, driving the Egyptians to create monumental structures dedicated to their gods, such as the Temple of Philae, which continues to astound today.

Amongst the thousands of massive carvings depicting the gods are the inscriptions of the ornate pictorial alphabet, telling the stories of this eons-old civilisation, and one, in particular, mentions a date, and so it was declared to be the last written hieroglyphs by the once mighty dynasty in 394 AD before Christianity swept the shores in 550AD.

New Delhi, INDIA

The centre of the modern population boom.

A staggering 1.38 Billion people call this country home, and everywhere on the streets, the trains, airports, buses, highways, hospitals, shopping centres, markets, temples or religious sites, people, noise, overcrowding and poverty are inescapable.

The simplest way to describe the impact of this is *"there is no longer enough of anything to go around"*, and the country's growth is far from slowing down, with the yearly population increase currently sitting at 13 Million people.

Generating employment for such a massive population in a country like India is very difficult, with the number of illiterate people increasing yearly as education is a luxury many don't have the finances to support.

Infrastructural facilities must also catch up with the growth, as land areas, water resources and forests areas are overexploited, again pushing people into desperate situations and the cycle of poverty, which can span generations.



The Himalayas, NEPAL

The rising sun begins to light the deep valleys of the Annapurna region, triggering the daily defrost of everything that ventures to this altitude.

The serrated mountains that loom in the distance are the destination as the slow climb begins up and around the valleys, trudging through the fresh snow as the way is hidden on the final day to reach Annapurna Base Camp.

Tons of powder sit precariously on the steep faces of the surrounding peaks, with the sun audibly loosening its hold as distant rumblings are heard but not seen. On continued approach, a chute of snow detaches itself and crashes into the chasm below, followed by the heaviness of silence as you tend to freeze for long reflective periods after such gargantuan power is witnessed.

The apex of Annapurna is not a peak yet a wall of monolithic proportions, that morning drenched in brilliant colour and light with the surrounding landscape filled with cloud-piercing summits, like rows of frozen thorns. The air is arctic cold, clean and cleansing, it seems to give you sustenance in itself, and although this place is incapable of maintaining life as the elements are too merciless, it's where life is measured best.





Dong Ha, VIETNAM

To survive, many Vietnamese unwillingly took up arms as they were threatened with violence to join the violence. Conflict, no one wanted it, they simply had no choice.

The Truong Son memorial site on the outskirts of Dong Ha holds an evocative sight of around 10,000 graves in remembrance of those who lost their lives. They represent a small fraction of the 300,000 soldiers missing in action from the war.

Many are unnamed but represent a generation lost to conflict. Some were so young that most of what they knew of this world was violence. Today it is a place of peace, and for the many who never knew the outcome of their loved ones, it represents closure, somewhere they can come to remember but also acknowledge a dark part of the country's past.

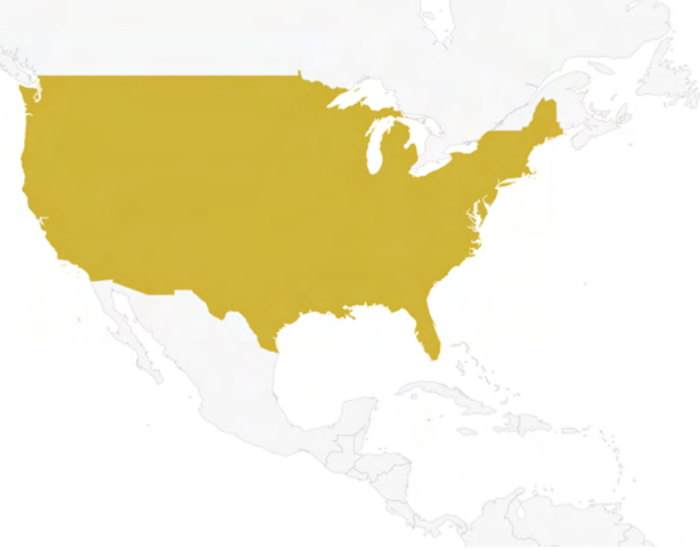
A small carving on a pillar near the entrance reads, *"Never allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated"*.



Kawah Ijen, Java, INDONESIA

Deceivingly beautiful and treacherous, the active volcano emits giant clouds of toxic gas beneath the acidic lake as a worker descends into the pit's opening to mine for sulphur.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA



Of land, of people.

America has always been polarized, with deep divisions between political parties and ideological groups, leading to tension and protests; its people have always struggled to find common ground and work towards a more unified future.

Is that what comes to mind when you hear the name AMERICA?

It is arguably the most diverse, divisive and discussed country globally. Say its name, and most already have an idea or opinion based on the media, history or their own experience traversing this vast and dissimilar land.

From the urban sprawl of Los Angeles and the Las Vegas circus to the Midwest's hospitality, endless experiences await, and countless natural wonders are ready to delve into.

Then to the East, the Capital sits, with pillars of stone hosting its history, then North, to the giant New York City, where communities within communities make up its some 19 Million residents. But this is just a slither of its incredibly diverse 50 states, as you could spend a lifetime traversing them and still miss out on someplace utterly different from all the rest.



Anchorage, USA.



California, USA
Somewhere outside Los Angeles heading into the Mojave Desert.



Kathmandu, NEPAL
Outside the ancient Jagannath Temple a girl and her little brother make their own fun. Playing and chasing around the thousands of pigeons in the courtyards of the bustling Durbah Square.



ជ័យ



Kathmandu, NEPAL
The bustling city sprawl.

"Dusty streets and low lit alleys intertwine to become your vehicle as you venture into a time unlike the present. The distant hum of busier streets, chanting prayers inside of shrines and bravado of street vendors all fill the air as the daylight and heat descend into the cool night. No neons illuminate, as the power grid fails times over during the night, plummeting the old sandstone structures into a romantic candlelit wonder".

Hole in the wall shops with produce, meats and spices fan their wares, wafting the smells of the delicacies into the alleyways while also fanning themselves to rid the remanding heat of the passing day.



Myin Ka Bar Village, MYANMAR

She dedicates herself to crafting handmade scarves and clothing items, which she sells to tourists and local markets in nearby towns. Around her neck, she proudly wears custom-made neck rings, a homage to age-old ideals of beauty cherished in both Asian and African cultures.

Although it looks as if the neck is being elongated, this is an illusion as it is only slightly lifted, its the shoulders, collarbone and upper ribs that are pushed downward, eventually shifting the bones and causing the appearance of an elongated neck.



Palmer, ALASKA

Nestled within Hatcher Pass in the Talkeetna Mountains lie the ruins of Independence Mine. Active between 1938 and 1951, the gold mining operation was once the second largest in Alaska behind the great Klondike region.

Today, eerie abandoned ruins dot the snowy landscape of the town once nicknamed "the Widowmaker" as many men who ventured there for riches never returned home.



Bagan, MYANMAR

Her skilled fingers, adorned with years of experience, weave together the fabric of cultural heritage, embodying the timeless artistry of Myanmar's rural communities.



VIETNAM

Geographically, a bewildering landscape.

Rain-soaked limestone cliffs piercing clouds to the North and palm-tree fringed waterways of the Mekong to the South, all producing timeless portraits of wild landscape unlike any other.

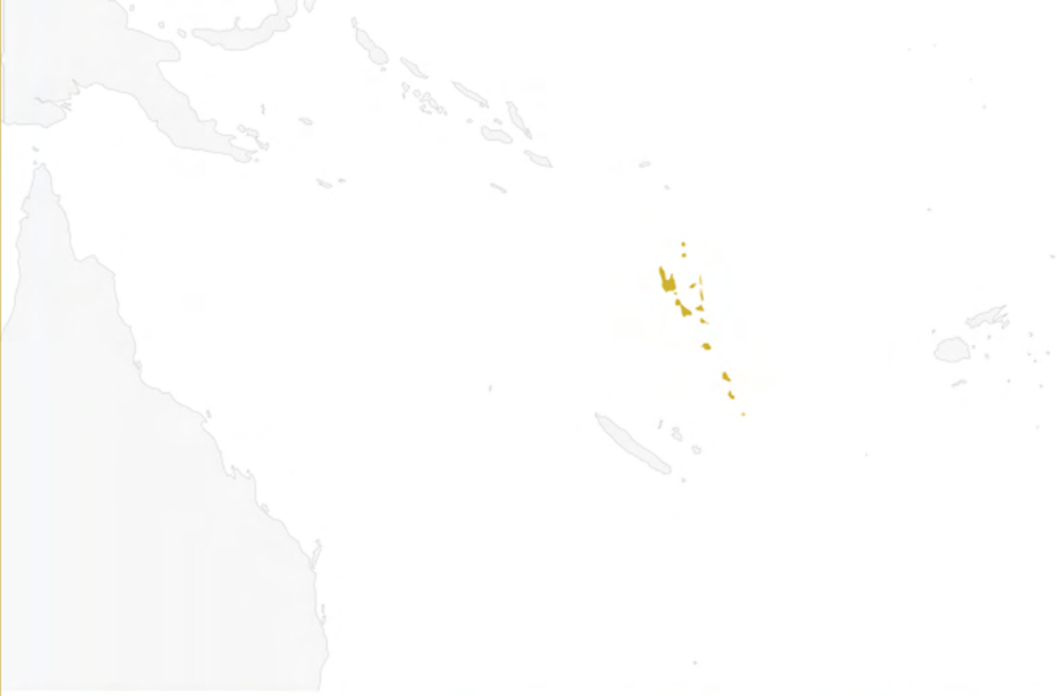
But a description of its finest assets would be in its people.

Young minds and old values focus on living in the present and let their happiness not be determined by the numbers that rule. Instead they bask in the good without feeding the bad.

Being so open to engage leads to unplanned experiences that make one feel an undiluted human connection.

Catching a ride through a steamy jungle trail on a motorbike with adventurous teens, kayaking down a river overnight and staying in traditional villages, sharing a beer with locals and having people that were strangers the day before opening their home and hearts.

Shy away from the highways, take the dusty roads, as the special memories are given by the kind people, not the place. Even after what the nation has experienced in decades past, they refuse to put up barriers that would otherwise divide, displaying a level of kindness and openness that is truly heart warming and I hope never changes.



Traditions of fire.

Stepping onto the tarmac, the sticky tropical breeze envelops you in a dampening embrace, carrying the sweet exotic perfume of the surrounding jungle as you surrender to the natural splendour of this South Pacific jewel.

In bustling Port Vila, the capital city and economic epicentre, life has pace as the streets move with a heavy pulse, whilst just an hour away, the hinterland kastom villages provide a glimpse into the cultural heritage of the Ni-Vanuatu people as Vanuatu is not just a picturesque haven but a land of opposing forces, where ancient customs and modern ways coexist.

Yet, the most mesmerizing sight of the islands is the active volcanos, especially on the Isle of Tanna. Standing on the edge, you feel the warmth on your face from its infinite cauldron and shudder with every rumble from its seething magma pulsating below. A humbling reminder of nature's raw, untamed power.

VANUATU

There are ample opportunities to explore these islands' rugged topography. From traversing dense rainforests, secret waterfalls and soaring peaks to exploring kustom villages and walking the barren grey sands around active volcanos, the options for the avid adventurer are limitless.



Tanna Island, VANUATU

Mt Yasur is one of the most active volcanos in the world.

With a height of 380mtrs above sea level, the glow was apparently what attracted Captain Cook to Tanna in 1774.

Mt Yasur's explosive crater is a sight that enforces the power of the natural world upon its viewing.

As you stare down into its core, tremors below your feet rattle though your body, fire red bursts of magma and rock fly high above the rim and shock waves so powerful you feel them hit you in the chest are frequently experienced from its spontaneous eruptions.



Tanna Island, VANUATU

The men wear nambas and the women, grass skirts.

Homes are made with what the forest provides, with some built among the branches, and others, particularly those used to take shelter from cyclones, in the hollows between the roots of giant banyan trees.



Tanna Island, VANUATU



Tanna Island, VANUATU



Tanna Island, VANUATU

Beneath the smouldering Mt Yasur a local makes his way from village to village across the barren sea of sands.

Reminiscent of another planet, winds carry the smell of sulphur and views above are filled with grey ash clouds shadowing a constant fiery glow.

The former site of Lake Siwi, now a large and lifeless place dotted with massive crevices and channels that cut through the black sands from when the lake mysteriously broke its banks and flowed out to sea.

Chatter amongst the locals believed it was taken away because of the decreasing number of devotees to the strange cults that are followed on the island.



Gokyo, Himalayas of Nepal.

Gokyo village, located at an elevation of 15,584ft, is one of the highest inhabited places on earth. Small buildings made out of rock and scree provide shelter from the freezing temperatures and snowfall as prayer flags outside these homes audibly whip back and forth in the gale-force winds.

The only colours on the roof of the world are the flags, the snow is white, the rock is grey, and accompanied by the unfathomable size of the surrounding peaks. It is here humans are at the complete mercy of nature.

Tanna Island, Vanuatu.

To venture around the lush volcanic island in the Pacific is to peer back into a distant past, much away from the normalities of modern times.

With a coconut full of kava in hand, the local narcotic mud-water, wandering through the villages and lives of those who inhabit the island, leaves one feeling dreamy and content in a place not ruled by the clock but obedient to the cycles of weather, necessity and tradition.



Petronas Towers – Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA



The River Ganges – Varanasi, INDIA



Giza, EGYPT



Honalulu, HAWAII



Bagan, MYANMAR.

The afternoon sun lights a corner of the Dhammayangyi Temple where Ko Lwin sits, awaiting passers by in hopes to sell his sand paintings.



A chorus of lives.

Two wheels along the North West coast of Sumatra, an indescribable sense of freedom and adventure, as if the path predicted the experiences I sought and laid them before me. The warm breeze passed through my clothes, scorching rays beat down on my legs, and the melodic hum of the engine created an almost meditative state.

Kilometres passed, and I gradually became more attuned to the life that enveloped me. The verdant forests, the palm-lined beaches, and all the small villages filled with people going about their days. It was a testament to the extraordinary span of how much life inhabits this earth, all the places that will never be seen and that all roads, narrow and dusty, that lead to people living out their own stories”.

INDONESIA



On the road, I encountered many locals who extended their hospitality and regaled me with conversation. Their tales illustrated daily tasks, struggles, and joys, enlightening me on a way of life foreign to the mindset I'd always known. It was a reminder that so much more exists beyond the superficial realm we typically see. Real human stories, not the highlights, are the ones that tend to reach in and wrap their fingers around your heart, and for that, I shall eternally be indebted to this place and its people.



Java, INDONESIA
The Kawah Ijen Sulfur Mine.



Mount Bromo, INDONESIA
Surrounded by a landscape reminiscent of a distant planet, the steaming giant and its desolate landscape is the visual opposite of the lush rainforests and beaches thousands of feet below on the island of Java.

Worshipped by locals as its power is seen as a natural god but with that also fear as it still on average, erupts once every four years, spewing black ash into the sky, turning day into the night with tremors that rumble under one's feet.

White sulphurous smoke continually pours out of the crater, and taking the time to hike up to the edge to peer into the hostility that lies just below the surface of the earth is well worth the effort.

Part of the Tengger massif, together with Semeru, Batok and Widodaren located in a plain called the Sea of Sand on Java, Indonesia.



Outside Leupung Village, INDONESIA

An hour South of the reigons capital Banda Aceh where much of the landscape was completely devastated by the 2004 Tsunami sits this general store. Far away from any hustle or bustle of busy streets and constant noise he makes a living on the dusty road.



Ho Chi Min City, VIETNAM

The Reunification Palace, also known as Independence Palace in the heart of Ho Chi Minh City. This grand building played a significant role at the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 when a North Vietnamese Army tank famously crashed through its gates. From the war rooms to the presidential office, every inch of its walls is steeped in history and legacy.



Hampi, INDIA

The Virupaksha Temple stands as one of India's oldest structures, dating back to the 7th century. Initially a modest shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva, it underwent significant expansion and embellishment during the reign of the Vijayanagara Empire. Under their patronage, the temple evolved into a magnificent architectural marvel, adorned with intricate carvings and soaring towers that reflected the empire's dedication to beauty and grandeur.

Kawah Ijen, INDONESIA

A worker pauses for a moment's respite, sitting on a basket laden with solidified sulfur rock, freshly extracted from the mine pit.





Kawah Ijen, INDONESIA



Cairo, EGYPT



Cairo, EGYPT

From the gates of the Citadel, a formidable sandstorm sweeps in from the western expanse, casting an impenetrable orange shroud across the city. Life is blinded as airports, businesses, and transit succumb to their might.

Khamsin, these sandstorms grace the annals of each year, yet seldom do they amass to this colossal scale.



Hemis Monastery, LADAKH

As the beating of drums and bellow of horns fill the air, the courtyard of the Hemis Monastery comes alive with a mesmerising display of dance and devotion.

HAWAII



Drops in the Pacific.

"As the sun sets over the North Shore, the sky is painted with soft blues and bright pinks; the gentle breeze carries the scent of the sea and its rolling waves, the soundtrack."

Sun-kissed skin from the day's adventures and a cold beer keep you warm as tranquility washes over you, disconnecting from the world's chaos".

Always, in nature, we seek sustenance.

North Shore, HAWAII

As pastel pinks and hues of calm paint the sky, the sun departs from another perfect day over Sharks Cove.



Luxor, EGYPT

The Karnak Temple complex dedicated to Amun, Mut and Khonsu is the largest religious building ever constructed. Known as Ipet-Isu or "most select of places" by the Ancient Egyptians is a city of temples built over 2,000 years from 2055 BC to 100AD, making its initial conception a staggering 4000 years old.

The massive columns in the Hypostyle Hall dwarf anyone wandering its stone paths, with the gigantic pillars standing 80 feet tall in bewildering quantity. Covering an area of 50,000sq ft, it easily overshadows many wonders of the ancient and modern world.

Imagine in its glory days, filled with people in elaborate clothing, draped in gold and water features flowing through its halls, while surfaces bursting with ornate paintings and inscriptions tell its rich tales. It is truly a masterpiece of creation by the human race that will stand long after we fall, time being irrelevant against its walls.

Jailsamer, INDIA





Ninh Binh, VIETNAM

Slow is the only way to explore the winding gravel roads and farming communities of the region as you cut through countless lush green fields surrounded by enormous limestone cliffs that pierce through the monsoon clouds.

Stopping to chat with and observe the locals simple yet effective way in which they continue traditions and put the freshest of food on the table.



Hampi, Karnataka State, INDIA

A young woman reflects on the day (or year) in a traditional bright orange sari that mirrors the painted tones of the setting sun.

Many uncertainties have come from recent times, but acknowledging the larger world through others' eyes is an education in perspective and patience, a guidebook in being comfortable sliding into the unknown.

Rarely easy, but befriend it, and you can walk beside the chaos of life in a peaceful and quiet confidence, yearning for the unseen just over the horizon.

If a dim light from the past comes knocking, don't answer; for the better, our future will rarely be faultless, so absorb these strange days with obscure happiness measured only by you.



Bagan, MYANMAR

Nagoya Temple piercing the fire lit skies around the ancient world of Bagan.

A long way from the cities and dense environments that fill us with a choking haze, here they remain open, calm and clear allowing the natural elements to thrive and highlight a true ancient beauty.

This place feels sacred, a far cry away, as the vast lands play host to a hundred different cultures and a thousand earthly mysteries for the eager to absorb.

Phonsavan, LAOS

The Plain of Jars is a vast archaeological landscape located in central Laos, which is known for its thousands of mysterious, ancient stone carvings.

The jars, some waist height, others up to two meters are believed to date back to the Iron Age, and their purpose and origins still remain a mystery.





Luxor Temple, EGYPT
The Ancient Egyptians' knowledge of the stars wasn't just a brief interest but a profound way of life used to measure fact rather than theory; it shaped their rituals, beliefs, and even architecture.

To explore this intriguing temple and gaze up at the same stars as they did some 3400 years ago when these pillars were initially conceived is a cosmic connection that transcends time.

Dynasties and dust.

Nestled amidst the colossal giants of Southeast Asia – Thailand and Vietnam – lies the modestly sized yet historically and culturally significant kingdom of Cambodia.

Its people are known for their resilience and strong spirit, having overcome many challenges in their history, including the Khmer Rouge regime of the late 1970s, which resulted in the loss of nearly two million lives. Still grappling with such legacies, many Cambodians suffer from poverty, lack of healthcare and education. Corruption and government repression remain pervasive issues, and the country is frequently ranked as one of the most corrupt in the world.

But these arid dusty streets of urban development and untamed jungles host some of the most spectacular ancient structures and kind people found anywhere. A treasure trove of wonders, brimming with the bygone Khmer Empire relics. Its ruins, hewn from sturdy sandstone, stand tall and proud, their intricate carvings and architectural finesse testaments to the unparalleled sophistication of the Khmer dynasty.

Despite tragedies, Cambodian people have managed to rebuild their country and culture, and they continue to progress towards a brighter future and welcome strangers with open doors, hearts and genuine smiles.



CAMBODIA



Phnom Penh, CAMBODIA

The prison complex that housed thousands of innocents in the capital of Phnom Penh was named *"Security Prison 21"*.

Upon arrival, people were photographed and required to give detailed autobiographies, beginning with their childhood and ending with their arrest.

Then, a day in the prison began at 4:30am when they were ordered to strip naked for inspection. The guards checked to see that the metal shackles were excruciatingly tight, causing pressure sores, or if the prisoners had hidden objects they could use to commit suicide, as that option was much better than living with their current reality.

The prisoners received four small spoonfuls of rice porridge and watery soup twice a day, which led to mass starvation, a way in which the guards could easily control the physically weak, even drinking water without asking, resulting in severe beatings.

These conditions caused skin diseases, lice, rashes, ringworm and other excruciating health ailments. All of these were left untreated as medical assistance was only offered to sustain a prisoner's life after they had been nearly fatally beaten during an interrogation.

With this man, I questioned why he still lived so close to the prison, as all these years later, surely it would be a better life to move away to salvage a future and heal this brutal past and his place in it, he said:

"It's more important to remember what happened than forget what happened."



Phnom Penh, CAMBODIA

The Khmer Rouge was a brutal regime that ruled Cambodia under the leadership of dictator Pol Pot from 1975 to 1979.

Pol Pot's attempts to create a "*Master Race*" through social engineering ultimately led to the deaths of more than 2 million Cambodians. Those killed were either executed as enemies of the regime or died from starvation, disease or worked to death.

A mass round-up and the raiding of homes across the country saw thousands of innocent civilians imprisoned in fear of them standing against The Khmer Regime or spreading words other than what The Khmer stood for. Completely innocent people, even if they were not against the regime, being neutral was considered non-supportive.



Kathmandu, NEPAL

Durbar Square in the heart of the chaotic sprawl.

Amongst the golden ornaments, intricate carvings and grand pillars, kings and queens were once crowned, conceived and held rule over the vast lands of Nepal.

A billion travellers from then till now have passed through this key on the old trade route between India and Tibet, and today, a peek into an ancient time of royal decadence.

For some, it's simply a quiet corner for trying to tap into the pages amongst the pigeons.



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Thiksey Village, LADAKH

Fallen leaves dance along the quaint footpaths that weave between humble homes and blossoming fields while the sun flickers through branches of age-old willows. Above, a monk peers out at the expansive mountains that encompass the lives of this beautiful and timeless village.

Fiordland, NEW ZEALAND

River crossings and torrential rain are met on the ascent of Gertrude Saddle in the Alps of the South Island.



Yangon, MYANMAR

The gold-flaked Pagoda, which is an unfathomable 2600 years old, is at the city's beating heart, a pinnacle of faith for the people devoted to Buddhism.

Here, it doesn't matter who you are.

From new money, a devoted monk, a stall owner, a businessman or just another traveller marvelling at the splendour of it all, what matters here is that you hold faith in your heart.

To the people that have long carried the weight of conflict on their shoulders and prayed for nothing more than peace in a nation burdened by the illusion of power, their faith has always been something that no amount of corruption can buy.



The Sahara Desert, EGYPT

The boat left me at the base of a towering dune on Aswan's West Bank. Hiking up the silent expanse, rumours of ancient kings' tombs guided my footsteps under the relentless desert sun. Each step was a battle against the shifting sands that filled my shoes, the weight causing involuntary leg spasms as I prayed for no more false summits.

At its peak is an infinite space where the sky and horizon merge. The Sahara Desert.

A few kilometres in, a weathered structure emerged, a welcome respite from the endless sea of sand and blistering heat. As I approached, a figure materialized, its coat blending with the desert hues. Its curious eyes met mine long before I knew of its presence.

The figure's gaze mirrored the astonishment I felt at this unexpected encounter – a dog, resilient and adapted to survive in the solitude of the Sahara and a reminder of their incredible spirit, faithful companionship and heart.



Hawaii, USA

Spring breakers immerse themselves in a boisterous contest of intoxicated bravado, oblivious to their silent neighbour, the juxtaposition of their lives a familiar sight around the island of Honolulu. The carefree exuberance of youth and wealth stands in stark relief against the quiet resignation of the man who must sleep in the shadows.



Cairo, EGYPT

In the heart of Cairo, the ornate domes of the Muhammad Ali Mosque stand tall, a resplendent marvel of Ottoman architecture. Its elegant minarets reach toward the heavens, beckoning the faithful to gather as one while a symphony of voices prepares to call upon their god.

"Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar..."

The call to prayer begins, and its melodious intonation pierces the air, drawing the hearts of the faithful and the curious alike. It is a sound that transcends time and a reminder of how far from home shores tonight I lay.



Java, INDONESIA

Brought on by the ever-increasing population and advancements in labour modernization, opportunities and options have become dire for many in such developing nations as Indonesia. So every day, in East Java, hundreds of workers venture into the toxic and dangerous heart of Ijen volcano to mine sulphur by hand. No machinery to ease the loads, no protection from poison clouds.

Tanna Island, VANUATU

On a small island in the middle of the vast Pacific Ocean, ancient beliefs and cultural traditions have seldom changed for thousands of years. Here, all natural phenomena hold a spiritual dimension and mystique, while strange cargo cults still hold the law in some lands.

Today there remain three active cargo cults whose followers believe ancestral spirits in planes and ships will return with crates of supplies to provide them gifts of nourishment. Two cults began during World War II when the United States descended upon Vanuatu from the skies. A sight that was seldom seen by the island's inhabitants. They magically seemed to appear from the clouds and gave the people strange, fascinating, yet valuable items incorporated into the old ways of the land.



The Nile River, EGYPT



Da Nang, VIETNAM

Milford Sound, NEW ZEALAND.





Hemis, LADAKH

There are very few places that teach us undiluted lessons in humanity and humility, such as on the road.

It humbles us by exposing the limitations of our knowledge and the narrowness of our perspectives of what lies beyond our daily familiarities. We shed the arrogance that often accompanies ignorance and embrace the humility that comes with acknowledging the vastness and complexity of cultures that differ from our own, as the more we immerse, the more we are humbled by how very little we know.

In the warm embrace of new friendships, reaching beyond the surface, hopes and dreams shimmer, unaffected by geographical divides. Laughter, sharing, and human connection become common, recognising the universality of joy, love, compassion, fear and dreams that thread our souls, no matter our exterior.



The Himalayas, LADAKH

The sun sets over the Thiksey Valley, casting a warm glow across a sea of blooming poplar trees, while the distant cliffs silhouette the Shey Monastery.



Myinkabar Village, MYANMAR

Just before the changing of the moon on the Burmese calendar, women of the village take a procession towards the local Buddhist temple.

Wearing traditional dress, they walk in single file through the village's backstreets and show praise through song along the way.



Currumbin Valley, Gold Coast, AUSTRALIA

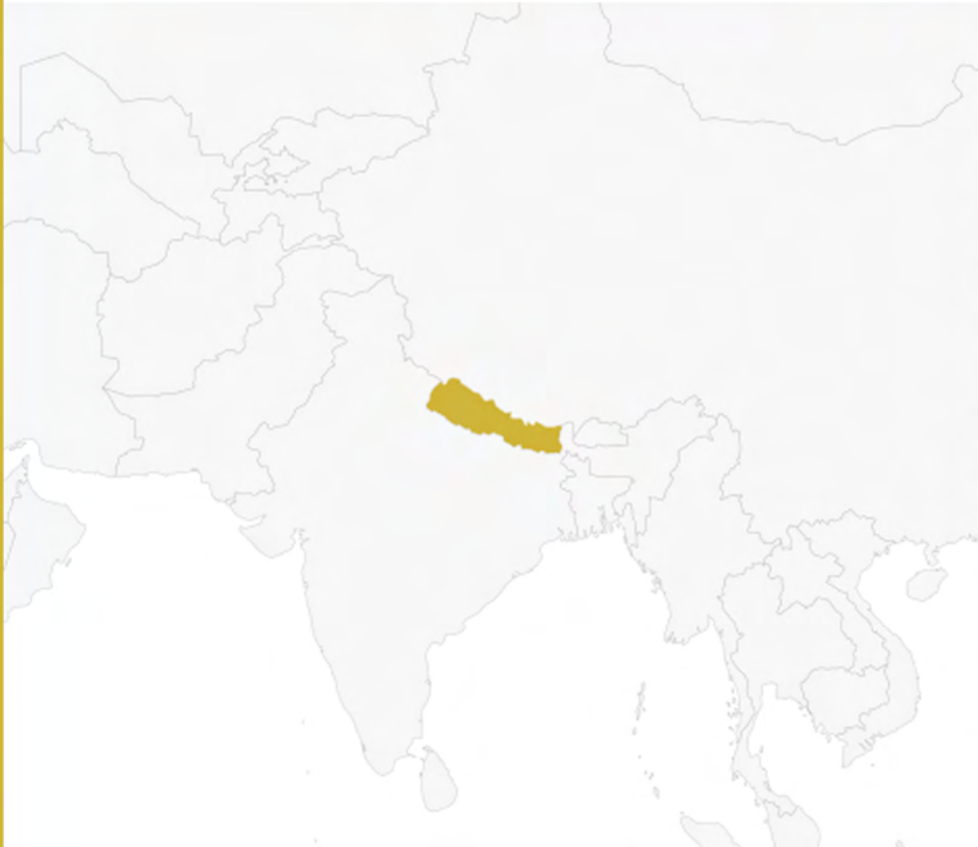


St Mary's Cathedral, AUSTRALIA
The historic pillars set amongst the towers of the city.



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NEPAL



In Valleys Beyond Measure

"If I have more ginger tea and dal bhat, I fear my body will reject it onto the stone floor. My head is splitting, my thoughts are scattered like a puzzle, and my muscles feel as though they've turned to water. I need substantial sustenance, a hot shower to defrost, and three days of uninterrupted sleep. I need to stop feeling like this." - "But remember, being here, in this place, is optional. It's not an obligation."

So why do so many venture to the roof of the world, a place that seems to reject life itself with its barren lands of stone, ice, and snow? Is it simply to "see" mountains? There are thousands of mountains worldwide, many much more easily accessed. Is it for the clout of conversation? To say, "been there, done that"? Hardly, as most have little interest in where your feet have trodden unless they have walked similarly.

The answer most frequently heard on the trails is "to test oneself." Each individual can only speak for their own feelings, and even then, translating those feelings into thoughts and words is nearly impossible.

It's "The Call of the Mountains," resonating alone in quiet moments and even louder when surrounded by noise. It's not a place or a singular destination sought after, but rather a feeling stumbled upon in moments of unawareness while chasing that "call."

Then, one day, unprepared, you realize you are living it, **staring up at the reality of a dream once dreamt.**



Mt Everest Region, NEPAL.
The roof of the world also
known as the Khumbu.
Home of the Sherpa people
and the mysterious Yeti. (?)

The Himalayas, NEPAL
Deep rumblings from across the valley as a giant avalanche descends from the steep walls of Mt Annapurna, the world's 10th highest mountain.

Because of its sharp exposed rock, near vertical walls, freezing temperatures, ice winds, avalanches and isolated location, only 191 people have achieved the summit, with 52 lives lost during attempts giving it a 32% death rate.

To give perspective on its absolute enormity, the wall, as pictured, is 13,000ft (3960m) in height.

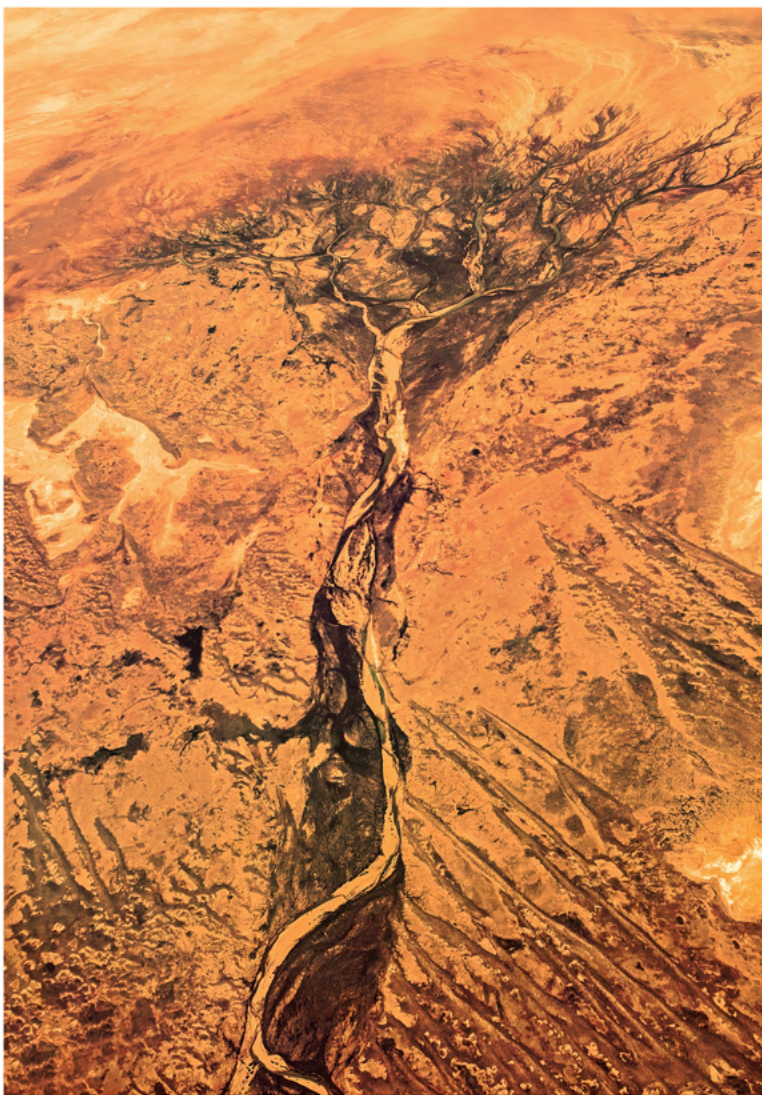




Hemis, LADAKH
Mother and child.



Thiksey, LADAKH
At first light, horns bellow from the rooftop of Thiskey Monesary, announcing the arrival of a new day.



Northern Territory, AUSTRALIA

Remote is an understatement when describing the Australian outback. The views of the earth here span further than the eyes are capable of and then much farther beyond that.

Although small townships are scattered amongst the masses of dirt, stone and sand, 40% of Australia's surface is uninhabitable as it is the second driest continent after Antarctica. When the rain does fall, it carves intricate lines through the landscape, mirroring branches of a tree ever reaching for sunlight, but the water, it runs for a place to settle, but just as quick as it has fallen, the desert makes it disappear.

The majesty of our natural world is difficult to put into words, so images are often the only accurate descriptor.



Kyaukpadaung Village, MYANMAR

The good-time juice of the nation "*Toddy Wine*".

An alcoholic spirit made from the sap of palm trees that fuels social times and soul-destroying hangovers.

Produced in timber and tin shacks like this one on the side of country roads, it has long been the go-to beverage for the millions of Burmese boomers, as a trip to the bottle shop in central Myanmar can be a half-day marathon.

How are we to ever learn the broader lessons of the human experience if we never bathe in lives that differ from our own, and yes, this sometimes means drinking a liquid flammable enough to fire up a scooter and then soaking it up with mystery meat sticks that have been sizzling over hot coals.

So accept all hospitality and throw away your intentions, as the "Toddy" has already made a reservation for your evening.



Pieces of a paradise.

Romanticized for good reason, as after travelling these lands, certain moments, places, and people will take residence in a small corner of your heart and never leave, as intended day trips turn into weeks, immersed in lands that one's mind defines as paradise.

Memories of slowly peddling down gravel trails through endless picturesque landscapes as towering limestone cliffs hover above the lush rice paddies, all in perfect symmetry.

Smiles in abundance from families tending their harvest as you blissfully cruise further into the heart of it all, and behind their subtle grins, a nod of agreement, as it is impossible to not acknowledge the beauty in what surrounds you.

Even the pleasures that the afternoon rain steers us toward when shelter is sought from the approaching monsoons. So, park up and take rest under thatched huts where pots of stock filled with unknown divine dishes bubble away. Go ahead rain, take your time.

As awe-inspiring as its physical beauty is, the people are its pinnacle. Strangers just a short day before, then friends as they open doors and hearts with instant connections over meals shared and pictures taken.



A few small yet beautiful memories will remain as you can't take them all, but the photographs, be they perfect or not, will remind us of joyful days with camera in hand and worlds to explore.

Ba Be N.P – VIETNAM

Vietnam currently produces 50 million tons of rice annually, with 70% of its 94 million population living in a rural community.

Rice is an invaluable commodity to the people, giving them a stable food source and an income. It also provides work opportunities where there are none, a new skill that can be passed down and a sense of purpose and value in a community.

The Montagnards, or highlanders, are a minority who tend to move seasonally, building make-shift homes next to their harvest. It is a lifestyle of hard work yet simplicity with minimal environmental impact.

In the mountains of the north, most of the fields are still worked traditionally, by hand and buffalo, the same way it has been for hundreds of years.





Mt Fansipan, VIETNAM

Where beautiful flowing silk Ao Dai dresses are proudly worn in celebration of such occasions as standing on top of the highest mountain in Vietnam and all of Indochina.

Hanoi, VIETNAM

The Hoa Lo Prison has played host to an abundance of inhumanities over its life span. Even the local names it is given, *"The Fiery Furnace"* or *"Hell Hole"*, conjure up thoughts of what unimaginable treatment those housed here faced.

Built by the French to imprison Vietnamese citizens who opposed colonisation during the French invasion, it quickly reached capacity as inmates ballooned from 460 to more than 2000, subjecting them to subhuman conditions and symbolising colonialist exploitation.

Fortunately, today it is a museum, a relic to remind everyone who passes through the atrocities we have bought on one another, which have all led Vietnam back to where it started over a hundred years ago, ruling itself, not by the laws of foreign nations.

Here, a Vietnamese woman sits in reflection inside the memorial room where the walls are adorned with the names of thousands who have had their life end in this dark place.





Ninh Binh, VIETNAM

One of the most beautiful places in the world.



New Delhi, India.

The Great Thar Desert, INDIA / PAKISTAN BORDER

200,000sq kilometres of wide-open space shaped by nothing other than the elements of itself. The wind, the sun and the rare rainfall.

Every sun-crisped scrap of fauna has barbs, hooks or thorns that aim to snag or splinter you with the lifeline of water hidden deep in wells below the dunes that only local knowledge can seek out. Then comes the truly unbearable heat. Anything that dares to challenge the power of the sun is sure to have its life extinguished, as this element in itself is enough to keep any person away, let alone try to establish a home.

But there are some small villages and settlements scattered among the vastness, as not all seek the immense solace that life here provides and following behind them, from domesticated backgrounds, the dogs of the desert were introduced. The free rangers, as locals refer to them, are seen as a problem. Nomadic pests hunt animals native to the area and sneak into pens or houses to scavenge anything to survive. But the harsh reality faced by those who were born here, combined with the impossible task of providing enough food for your family, let alone a pet, is what pushed the dogs to stray further out.

With three camels, my guide and I travelled through the desert, passing villages and the Pakistan border to deliver one of the camels to a small community. Nor a dangerous or wild beast, this tired old female dog with protruding hips and patchy fur, much to the frustration of my fellow traveller, followed us for days at a distance, as in secret I was giving it water and food. As my guide reluctantly gave in, it crept closer and closer each night to share in the comfort provided by the company of other living things out in the great vastness.

TASMANIA

Tasmania, Australia's smallest state in terms of size and population, draws strength from its isolation. This very seclusion has preserved its unique charm and untouched wilderness. Known as the isle of stone, it stands resiliently in the midst of the roaring forties, a region renowned for its fierce winds and tempestuous seas.

This island is a sanctuary of unscathed nature and untamed wildness. Within its borders, ancient arctic forests, vibrant with fluorescent greens, loom over pristine streams. These waterways journey from the snow-dusted peaks of the island's mountainous interior down to the picture-perfect coastlines that encircle the land.

This is a place where time slows, allowing you to immerse yourself fully in the natural wonders and historical narratives that define Tasmania. Whether you are an adventurer seeking the thrill of the wild or a traveler in search of peace and beauty, Tasmania offers a journey that is both profound and transformative.





Cradle Mountain, TASMANIA

Looming over the surrounding landscape is the highest surviving pinnacle of the Southern Island.

A provider of lessons in the patients of greater time, being birthed some 20,000 years ago, it still holds strong, allowing us to gaze up in privilege of what hope and wonderment the natural world can still evoke in us. Life below, overflowing in the urgency of now, holds no sway up here. It's the elements that dictate your next move, as numbers are of no concern to the mountains.

An abundance of gratitude, as today met me with the rare combination of snow on ground and sun in sky.



The Southern Capes, TASMANIA

Protruding some 300m out of the ocean are Australia's highest sea cliffs. No image can portray their magnitude.

It is to venture here on foot, to be battered by the southern winds and feel the call of the void. That strange pull we experience when on the edge. It's then to the step back, to safer grounds with our resolve deeper than before.

Being this far South creates an undeniable feeling of isolation; it's these vast distances that keep wild places just that, wild. Untouched, unspoilt and far from the unsightly scars of our human impact, it's here that inspires hope for the natural world in witnessing the strength and beauty these pillars portray while standing defiant in the face of progress.



Yangon, MYANMAR

One of the most sacred and impressive sites in all of the world is the Shwedagon Pagoda, rising up and above the city of Yangon.

At 325ft, the golden stupa is adorned with 27 metric tons of gold leaf, thousands of diamonds and numerous colourful gems.

At dusk, it is illuminated, highlighting its astonishing beauty.



Kathmandu, NEPAL

The extreme **CONTRAST** of life around the city is everywhere.

Cows held sacred to the Hindu religion roam the polluted streets, sifting through piles of rotting garbage and battling disease, whilst above, modern high-rises host banks and investment companies that peer out at slums overflowing with poverty and social exclusion.

Here, actions or attitudes don't fall into the simple categories of wrong or right; as locals describe, things just *"are"*. Being born into poverty is just that, being raised with an education is just that, and for these reasons, the outdated class system stays as it has for decades, gravitating one up or, by default, being drawn down.

For those of us who temporarily pass through, it's the wild west of grand adventures and untameable peaks, but for unfortunate souls tethered to this place by ill cycles, it's a daily struggle to keep grasp of the bare essentials, let alone dare to dream of a life beyond these streets.



Yangon, MYANMAR

On the eve of the Tazaungdaing Festival, the Shwedagon Pagoda, in the heart of it all, bustling and full of energy, is the place to be. Positivity surrounds this day as thousands across the nation celebrate the end of the rainy season by dressing in intricate and colourful longyi whilst making generous offers for prosperity and good health.

If you are a stranger to these ways, it doesn't matter; welcoming gestures and invitations will flow, as it is a living culture, able to breathe and grow as energy is offered.



Ban Napia Village, LAOS

An American flag towel hangs on a clothes line next to a fence build by bomb casings dropped by the U.S on the neutral nation during the Vietnam War.



Ninh Binh, VIETNAM

Reliving together our personal stories of journeys taken through life, the comfort of impunity among strangers lets our hearts flow, or simply the sharing of tea one has made with care feeds our compassion.

These are the beautiful memories, the best ones, given by the people, not the place.

After what this nation has experienced and how tough daily life can be, they refuse to put up barriers between themselves and others of a different background, displaying a level of acceptance and humanity that is rare and, I hope, never changes.



The Ganges, INDIA

Amidst this sea of fabric, a lone figure tends to the garments, a caretaker of this open-air laundry, where renewal mirrors the rituals across the river.

Yet, on closer approach, the scene is punctuated by a haunting juxtaposition—scattered amongst the clean clothes are fragments of human bones. Remnants of lives lived are now reduced to bleached relics by the sun and sand. They serve as a stark reminder of the cycle of life and death that defines this sacred city. Here, where the living perform their daily chores, the presence of the departed lingers, a representation to Varanasi's role as both a cradle and a crypt.

Tanna Island, VANUATU

Just a man taking his chicken for a walk below an active volcano.





בניגוד



Giza Pyramids, CAIRO

Animals were once revered in Egypt. The ancient Egyptians mummified animals such as cats, dogs, monkeys and birds as offerings to the gods or to help the animals reach the afterlife, but the Egypt of old is a far cry from the current reality of this overpopulated and impoverished country where the ethical treatment and well being of other living creatures is far from a concern and more of an afterthought.

Well hidden from travel publications and social media, inside the Mecca of Egyptian Tourism, emaciated horses pant and strain as they pull carts loaded with tourists up the slopes. Some slip and stumbled on the smooth tarmac surface while others struggle to pull the outdated and rickety carts up the soft sands, all while drivers lash their backs to move them along to complete a quick tourist loop as fast as possible.

Many have open wounds from the straps and makeshift harnesses, plus the weight of the wooden cart with four adults and an intolerable 42-degree heat; you can imagine the mental and physical stress they are under. As easy as it would be for the tourism complex, local council or government to set up, there is also no water source within the site for even the slightest respite.

In smaller communities based around farming and the waters of the Nile, there thankfully can be a better quality of life for these horses, but within Cairo, a crowded megalopolis of noise, stress, abuse and neglect, a complete lack of empathy for the suffering is witnessed.

It is "*hell on earth*" for these horses, but in an impoverished and corrupt country, how is ethical tourism achieved or enforced?



Fiordland National Park, NEW ZEALAND



Valley of the Kings, EGYPT

On the West Bank of the Nile River, surrounded by endless desert, is one of the world's most significant burial sites. Tutankhamun, Ramses II, and Seti I are just a few pharaohs, rulers, and consorts to be buried here during the New Kingdom of ancient Egypt.

The valley contains multiple tombs carved deep into the rocky hills with massive stone pillars lining the entries, while inside, tunnels burrow hundreds of meters deep, every surface intricately carved and painted to detail stories of the afterlife.



Leh, LADAKH

The incredible detail and beauty of traditional Tibetan dress, proudly worn in the Himalayan town of Leh.

Beyond the aesthetic splendour, what truly sets Leh apart is its people's genuine and profound warmth. It's a sensation beyond mere hospitality; it's as if each interaction is infused with a deep-rooted kindness that instantly makes you feel like a welcomed friend.

In a world where genuine connections sometimes feel fleeting, Leh is a poignant reminder that humanity's capacity for authentic compassion is alive and thriving.



Jaipur, INDIA.

Inside the *"Pink City"* is an incredible blend between the modern world and the old with the states capital hosting maybe the most impressive ancient architectural feats. Walking around some corners is like stepping back all those years into its glory days.



Annapurna Base Camp, NEPAL.

The giants engulf your every view on the trail to the 10th highest mountain in the world, Mt Annapurna. Alpine forests lead to stone covered valleys then up through freezing snow to stand and stare in awe at the otherworldly view.



Pyramids of Giza, EGYPT

Children fly kites and laugh from rooftops in simplistic joy as the irresistible aroma of coffee, warm and cupped in one's hand, enhances a brief moment of pure contentment.

Beautiful little moments found in faraway pockets (shared with a stray).



Sumatra, INDONESIA

Otherworldly Mt Sibayak. A towering stratovolcano above the township of Berestagi, spewing forth its toxic gas from sulphurous fumaroles.

ALASKA

Where the wind screams and shouts.

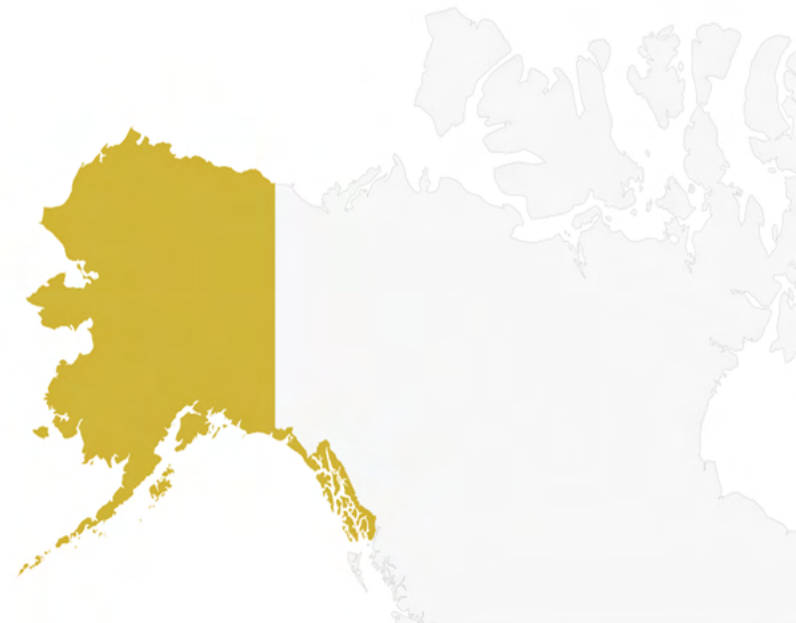
Each breath feels like a cascade of ice to the lungs, with stiff fingers clutching to pack straps for reassurance, they become cold. So cold they take effort to straighten, so you leave them, gripping, as your teeth feel sharp from the frozen breath drawn through them. The biting wind is a constant reminder of this endless wild in which the unforgiving cold seems to leech any warmth from your body and thoughts.

Earlier, a forest etched from dreams, lush and vibrant, a feast for the senses, drawing you deeper into a world that seems to pulse with life. A narrow river cascades, pines dance in the sky and between, a symphony of sounds. Yet with each step ascending the mountain, the temperature drops precipitously as the frozen wind tears through your layers as dirt trails patched with grass give way to sharp rocks and blankets of snow.

On the tree line, the winds howl even more ferocious, now dominating all sound. Then out in this place, you realize you are not the only living creature as your eyes scan the landscape while branches creak and movement churns the imagination as to what may be sharing these isolated paths.

Eventually, a sense of relief as the landscape opens up, and behold, a sprawling valley below as fatigue is swept away by the sheer awe of what is before you. Vast expanses of ice and unfathomable space with towering ice-capped peaks, pinnacles of stone and nothing but wild so enormous, your eyes can't focus on its end.
A true testament to the power of time and nature.

At its heart, a gleaming masterpiece of icy artistry, jagged contours and glittering facets, cutting down through the valley over eons of time as thoughts of what eyes past, present and future have and will stand in its company.
Today it is you and yours alone.



Denali National Park, ALASKA





Matanuska Glacier, ALASKA
An ice climber heads to the peak of the Matanuska Glacier with the Chugach Mountains looming in the background.

At 27 miles (43 km) long by 4 miles (6.4 km) wide, it is a ginormous mass of constantly moving ice that cuts through the valleys of the surrounding peaks.



The Kenai Peninsula, ALASKA

Adorned with swaying pines that encompass the shores of glistening glacier lakes as gentle currents caress the smooth stones along the banks.

This vision is one of dreams.

"The Kenai" stands unparalleled in its exquisite natural beauty and has held allure since my youth, a beckoning as though I had ventured there at a previous time and yearned to immerse myself in its space once again.



Mekong Delta, VIETNAM

A devotee lights a large bundle of incense sticks as thousands around the temple constantly burn, filling the hall with a haze of smoke, considered a cleanser in this ancient religion.

Wandering through its fragrant and colourful interior is a step back to when it was initially built in the late 19th century during a mass movement of people from China into the greater Indochina areas.



Lung Tam Village, VIETNAM

Traditional and timeless garments of the Hmong people in the Northern Highlands are slowly and carefully created by blending, weaving, boiling and dyeing the unique and beautiful colours specific to the region's people.

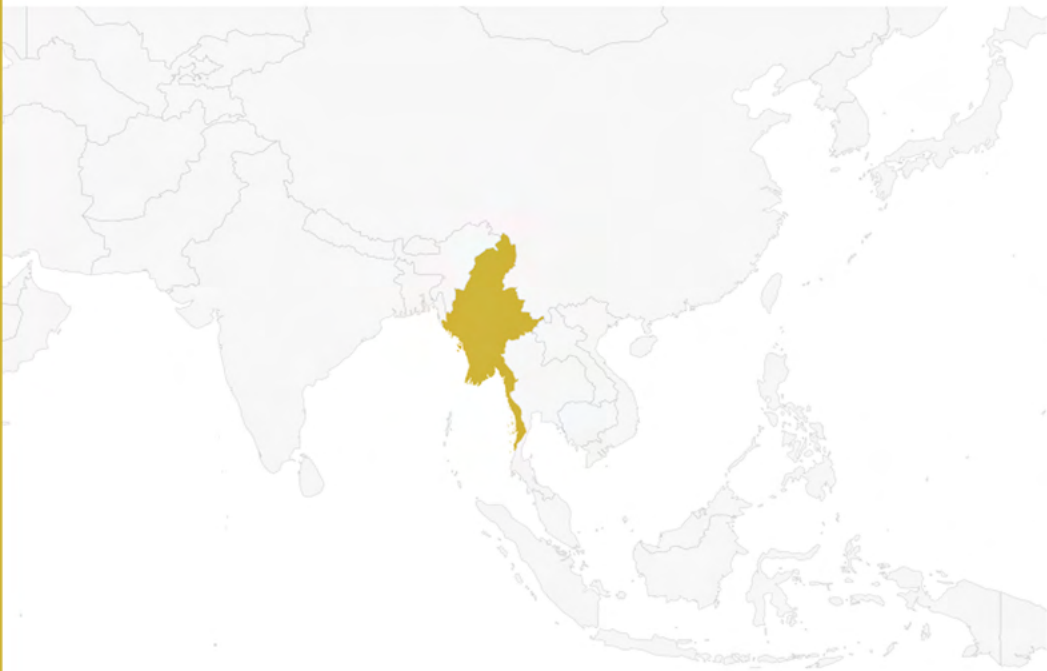
As modernisation swiftly pushes itself further afield, the appeal of the now holds sway for many descendants, and the slow traditions of their ancestors are practised less often. But fortunately, for now, we can still seek out and experience old ways that may soon perish but currently co-exist and survive parallel with the enormity of our own push for evolution.

These intricate practices born out of necessity in the mountains take time and show immense attention and care, as once finished, they are proudly worn by their maker and passed down for generations.



Chomphet, LAOS

Young monks in training return to their small Monastery in the lush jungles bordering the Mekong.



The allure of the Orient.

The first time I travelled to Thailand was in 2008. Unbelievably muggy and hot, cheap, exotic, loud and like nothing I'd experienced.

It was an era before smartphones became the number one travel accessory, as your only recourses were a Lonely Planet paperback, word of mouth and some dial-up at an internet cafe on Kho San Road. It was an exciting time to see the world before social media and the digital realm became the sole reason for so many to travel. Places made of dreams were found by the few brave tramping far from the well-worn trails, not via hashtags.

No google maps in hand to direct; you simply had to ask the locals, get a little lost or stumble onto something more interesting than you initially sought. No accommodation booking; you used your initiative and feet, venturing into places that looked cheap or, again, by word of mouth. You engaged with everybody on the streets, as at that time, no one was looking down onto a screen, and no one was taking selfies. The best places to eat were packed with locals, not how many stars it had online. You got a little ripped off occasionally, paying more for a train ticket or tuk-tuk than you should, but it was only a small amount, and they definitely needed that extra dollar or two more than you. This happened because you didn't have a currency converter app in your pocket.

Our obsession with future happiness was absent, but feeling in the moment was not, as you didn't review your days on a screen; you just kept moving forward in anticipation of the next.

I've returned multiple times over the years, and although it has lost much of its charm with the unstoppable force of progress and development, some things are still undeniably beautiful.





Phuket, THAILAND

The star of the show, backstage in his room.

A room that is the only space he knows, with just enough width to turn around but not enough height to stand up straight.

Out in the South East sun, it's a few degrees cooler than boiling, but he has all he needs. Water, no. Food, no, but the ever-present chain is there to remind him of his purpose.

Hungry, dehydrated, fatigued or stressed. Either way, it doesn't matter, the show will go on. The people want their entertainment as anticipation grows for his performance with forced applause.

A strike on the metal cage with a steel baton, that's his cue.



Surabaya, INDONESIA

East to West across the island of Java by the timeless railway. Such a romanticised mode of transport, and for good reason.

Here the trains are a little different. They're loud, bumpy, slow and, best of all, wide open. The lack of windows lets the steamy breeze swirl throughout the cabin as it's more welcomed than the trapped heat roasting the pilgrims on the inside. With this, all the smells of the passing world flood in; it could be some meat sticks grilling over hot coals on a platform ready to be sold to passengers through said windows or a ginormous half-dug trench in which towns or villages throw their rubbish, human waste and dead animals into.

Through towns, villages and cities, you witness tiny glimpses of millions of lives that call this developing nation home, and within these shared fragments are curious conversations, incredible generosity and genuine smiles. The humbling lessons of the human experience are witnessed on these rails, allowing our souls to learn and grow.



Phonsavan, LAOS

Two curious sisters wonder why a stranger is photographing their fence, built entirely by numerous exploded bombshells and casing.

The region of Phonsavan is one of the poorest in the county, and to add to it was also the most bombed during the U.S. secret bombing campaign during the Vietnam War.

In a small out of way village called Ban Tha Jok, the large bomb casings, mostly around six to eight feet in length and diameter, that exploded on impact are in disturbing abundance. They are everywhere. The resourceful people of the village, rather than dispose of these harsh relicts have intelligently fashioned them into new and more purposeful items such as building materials to construct houses, fences, animal feeders, garden beds, water collecting tanks, cutlery and even large grills for cooking.

The quaint village, although shy, is full of such kind people who will always flash you a smile and happily point out their ingenuity.



Kenai Peninsular, ALASKA



Ninh Binh Region, VIETNAM.

Only a few hundred people call the village of Coi Khe their home. The community relies solely on the land and its inhabitants to produce the food they consume.

There are no grocery stores, no takeout places and nourishment here never comes out of a plastic packet. So on a Sunday, the local market is held where everyone brings what sustenance they have to sell and trade.

It is not a place for people unfamiliar with Vietnamese culture, and by all means, definitely not for those who hold unchangeable opinions. It's for the locals. The hard workers and bent backs who know all too well about not having enough.

Embedded in the culture, no one knows precisely when or why the Vietnamese choose to consume certain things that other cultures consider sacrilege, but nothing here goes to waste, and I mean nothing, and although it's tradition, doubtful is the next generation to be so dedicated to this part of their past.

Bagan, MYANMAR

Inside the ancient Dhammayangyi Temple, Ko Lwin sits and waits with his sand paintings, which he sells to visitors for a small amount, as do many other young Burmese around the sprawl of temples that make up Central Bagan.

Sometimes it's just luck; other days, he must hustle, as his family rely day to day on what each member contributes as all is shared around the family table.

He was pleased and happy for the company that sunny afternoon as he had sold six paintings, which he said was a "*good day*" with a genuine smile.

I hope now, with the current situation not just in Myanmar, but the world, that Ko Lwin and the thousand of others like him are doing ok, seeing as many families' entire livelihoods rested upon tourism, which is currently devastated in this nation.



Rajasthan, INDIA

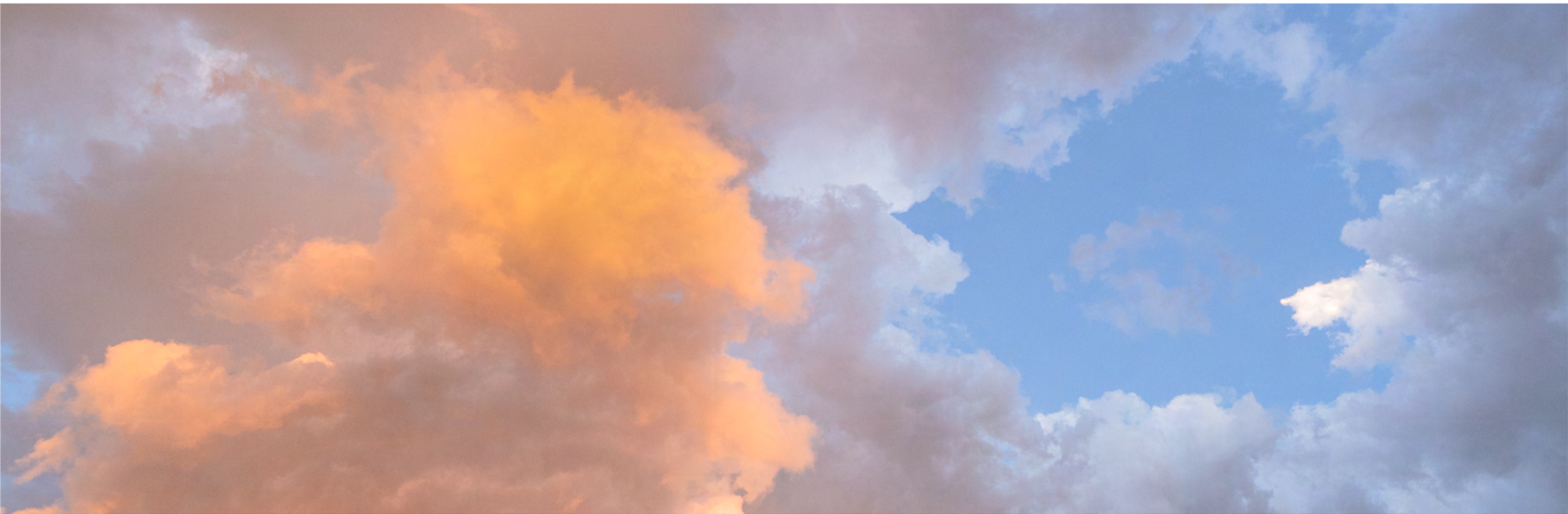
Towering over the Pink City of Jaipur, perched among the barren hills, is the domineering Amber Fort. A pillar of physical rule, even by today's standards, that modern architecture fails to compete with.

To gaze up and vision what life would have entailed during previous centuries when ancient dynasties attempted to overthrow the palace and its rulers from its initial birth some staggering 1000 years ago.

Smoke clouds from nearby fires drift over some 500 stairs, the ascent for dedicated pilgrims, who fill the air with hymns and prayers, respecting the holy past rooted in the surrounding valleys. Donning bright-coloured saris with an array of traditional headwear, slow and steady is the way as the views contrast the city below and this timeless kingdom.

A thousand hands have run over the cracks and intricate details of the warm sandstone monolith before mine, intimately gathering its stories through touch as you create your own and become a minuscule part of its vast lifespan, as all those years ago, who carved this block from stone, was it out of love for their king or fear. This one particular stone.

If these people who dedicated their lives to building such glorious pillars could only know that I and many more, all these hundreds of years later, are beyond bewildered, staring up into its vast being.



تضاد



Annapurna Region, NEPAL
The sun rises on a perfect day over The Himalayas.

Ban Naxom Village, LAOS

At this stage of my travels and life, I have seen countless small villages and communities in developing places. *I may tire in reaching them, but I never tire for the life that inhabits them.*

At each, I take my time in walking the brief stretch of the townships. The inhabitants, usually numbering in the dozens, always greet me with a friendly curiosity as I search for fleeting moments of everyday existence. The rain comes and goes, each downpour ushering life to take shelter, only to have the sun reemerge just the same mere moments later.

Every village, every person, every face has a story, most with a narrative that leans toward finding the joy in the little things, a life that, despite its modesty, can be abundant in its own way.

Yes. Life here is elemental, but it is profound, as people, unencumbered by the trappings of modernity, still gaze skyward at the rain, in awe of such simplistic beauty.





Tanna Island, VANUATU

The thumping of feet on the earth echoed the distant rumbles of the revered Yasur volcano, their rhythmic cadence blending with the natural pulse of the land.

Cairo, EGYPT

A sandstorm sweeps in from the distant deserts to the west of the city, a relentless force of nature that obscures the skyline with a swirling veil of tan and ochre, transforming the cityscape into a gritty, otherworldly scene.





Wiendorfers Forest, TASMANIA



Java, INDONESIA

This place feels like an inhospitable distant planet, but here it sits, on the island of Java, spewing forth its innards of toxic gas and smoke. The crater lake next to the chimneys is a mirage, as its hues of blue and aqua seem almost inviting, but this deceiving body of liquid is the largest acidic lake on earth.

When the wind changes direction, the gas immediately pulls the oxygen out of your lungs and replaces it with a vile and burning sensation that makes you feel suffocated. Your eyes water over in a split second, and no matter how hard you try, you just cannot open them. This is your body going into involuntary protection mode.

This spot in the belly of the crater is where the miners spend their days, by hand, pulling rock from earth.



Luang Prabang, LAOS.

Inside the Wat Xieng Thong Temple sits King Sisavangvong in his final resting place. An urn of ashes on top of a massive hand-carved funeral carriage adorned with seven nagas on the prow.

Surrounding it, lines of smoke are illuminated from the sunlight flowing onto the offerings of incense and prayers provided by the devoted as quiet whispers of acknowledgment are given to get one's soul right with the universe.

Stepping outside, The Mekong snakes around the inland peninsular that hosts the ancient Wats with coconut palms, colonial architecture and old push bikes lining the quiet streets.



The Pyramids of Giza, EGYPT

At Giza, the setting sun drapes the pyramids and Sphinx in a golden glow while a curious cat basks in the warm evening light. Ancient history meets natural beauty on the plateau.



Hemis, LADAKH

In the heart of these mountains, devotion finds expression in the spinning of a giant prayer wheel. Worshippers' hearts entwined with ancient teachings seek to accumulate merit and purify karma outside the Hemis Monastery.



Naga Village, LAOS

A couple of kilometres outside the small and dusty yet bustling riverside town of Vang Vieng, the landscape transcends into almost mythical proportions.

Limestone jungle-covered pillars reach hundreds of feet into the sky, fresh emerald streams crisscross the valleys and rice fields, with their near-perfection alignment, cover the landscape.



Ta Van Village, VIETNAM

In terraced lands above a small community, a woman lives alone in her modest home, built of bamboo and elements of the earth.

Her mornings are spent tending a small harvest and a few chickens, while the afternoon, slowly walking the narrow dirt paths that cut through the ricefields and lead into the dense forest above.

One can imagine in her golden years, these walks amongst the vast solitude also bring loneliness, as staring deeply into the bamboo forest that borders her home is where I met her, in a moment of deep reflection whilst the fleeting warmth of the afternoon sun kissed her cheek. The unspoken tales her eyes tell.



On the outskirts of Alyeska, ALASKA

"Driving down the Seward Highway on a rainy and overcast morning heading South towards the Kenai Peninsula, a few abandoned train carriages stood out in a clearing within the distant forest. Dwarfed by the mountains above and sprinkled with snow, a narrow gravel road was the way to explore the ruins against the bleak but beautiful scenery.

Moving from carriage to carriage peering inside for anything of interest, the colours were illuminated from the saturation of a passing storm. Faint sounds could be heard within one of them, barely audible over the dripping rain on the ruins.

In the wild, it was no mystery that an animal had taken shelter from the elements, but peering inside, at first glimpse, an internal shiver of fear as just meters away was a domineering Bald Eagle who knew I was there long before. Fierce yet composed, it perched on a collapsed piece of timber next to a window where soft light flowed in. With camera raised, nothing but standing hairs and gratitude as it stared straight back, granting one image".

An eagle in the sky, a dolphin in the ocean, a deer in the forest.
Our connection to the natural world is never more lucid than in moments of interaction with an animal in the wild.



Leh, LADAKH

The spiritual enclave deep within the Tibetan plateau.

Women in unbelievably intricate traditional dress line the street, eagerly awaiting the reincarnation of a revered Dali.



Cairo, EGYPT

From door to door, roughly 65 hours in transit – from Australia to Egypt. Then, 10 hours of deep, dark, silent sleep. Slowly, I awaken to find myself in the heart of Cairo. My brain adjusts to the surroundings – the light, the smell, that surreal feeling akin to stepping into a dream.

I open the timber shutters leading onto a small deck, overlooking weathered buildings and a city where 22 million lives begin to stir under the warm morning light. Behind hundreds of windows, each concealing the daily rhythms of urban life, Cairo awakens.

LADAKH



The biggest of skies.

The seeking of solitude isn't always about introversion; sometimes, it's about finding authenticity in a world that rewards fictional narratives.

With Tibet to its East, Pakistan to its West and surrounded by The Himalayas, Ladakh, or "Little Tibet", is a spiritual haven of immense depth, dusted with ancient monasteries that house the teachings of sacred practices.

Sitting at an altitude of 4000mtrs and hosting numerous peaks over 6500mts, it is a natural fortress, protected by isolation with impenetrable mountains at its gates. In winter, it's a blanket of white, as temperatures reach minus -25 degrees; then, during summer, the glacier melt feeds the valleys, creating thousands of intricate trails full of blossoming foliage that burst with colour against the otherwise desolate landscape.

Along the dust and stone trails that lead through small villages, humble homes built of stone line the paths, providing warmth and protection from the elements, while within, a place to rest by the fire and a cup of Yak tea is always at the ready for a passing stranger. A caring and warm embrace in a freezing cold place.

If this path, taken, may lead to a home, hold on to the courage and be at its mercy.



Thiksey Monastery, LADAKH

At first light, within the hallowed halls of Thiskey Monastery, devotion echoes through the air. Chants and incense intermingle, creating an ethereal ambience that bridges the chasm between centuries. Here, rituals remain unchanged, an unbroken thread connecting the present to an ancient past.

In modern times, very few traditions of old are still practised.

If so, they are usually in tiny pockets of faraway places like this, wedged between The Himalayas and the Incredibly vast Central Chinese Plateau, thousands of kilometres away from today's modernity.



Hemis Monastery, LADAKH

Since the 1630s, the monastery has been the hallowed grounds for an annual tradition spanning two centuries.

During this remarkable event, various assemblies of monks don vibrant clay masks and meticulously crafted ensembles, then, for two enthralling days, they partake in mesmerising dances and rituals, commemorating the timeless triumph of virtue over malevolence while invoking blessings of rejuvenation upon the land.



Thiksey Monastery, LADAKH

At an altitude of 4000mtrs, undiluted light burns across the courtyard at sunrise, re-warming the blood of the Monestaries' residence, cool from the icy night.



Leh, LADAKH

A monk makes his way down the rocky scree from the Tsemo Maitreya Temple, perched high above the township of Leh.

"Little Tibet" is what this Northern State of India is referred to, as it has one the highest concentration of monasteries, stupas and places of worship for Buddhism in the world.

Dahab, EGYPT

Stretching across extensive distances, the Sinai Desert and Mountains dominate hundreds of kilometres on a single front, while the vast expanse of the Red Sea reaches towards Saudi Arabia on the opposing side.

This geographic marvel also holds great significance in Christian history, as it is believed to be the very mountains where Moses inscribed the Ten Commandments and, in a moment of exodus, miraculously divided the sea for safe passage.



Leh, LADAKH
End of the road.

Our world can resemble a blanket woven with love and warmth, yet sometimes, it feels to have grown harsh, cold and distant.

Within, our hearts flutter with emotions too profound to grasp, so we seek solace in the visual splendour of the surrounding peaks, or gaze up to the stars, ignited with boundless wisdom, untouched by the trivial concerns of our existence.

So we take steps. An infinite amount on endless trails where no final summit awaits, and along the way, a sense of realisation, in that we are far from alone in trying to unpack the weight we ALL carry.

Bumps and bruises is how we are seen, yet our blisters go unnoticed.

In the deepest abyss of despair and uncertainty, shadows cloak the heart, yet within the darkness lie the seeds of resilience, awaiting a gentle reminder, such as this witnessed moment, that it takes compassion for a garden of healing and strength to grow.

Above the town of Leh, in a moment of crippling uncertainty, my eyes are frozen on the horizon. Then, wearing colourful headscarves and strolling up the dusty path to join the sun in its encore, a mother and daughter perch, eating ice cream while smiling, giggling and shouldering each other in a moment of pure joy, as if this afternoon, they have their own secret ritual, just for the two.

Guiding hearts to beat closer.



Varanasi, INDIA

The smell of smouldering funeral pyres hangs heavy by the Ganges river in Varanasi, the mystical Indian city where Hindus believe being cremated will free them from the cycle of rebirth.

For families that can afford the luxury of enough wood, the body is cremated down to ash, and their loved ones are passed as dust into the water. For those that can only afford a partial cremation, the body enters the Ganges partially broken down but enough so for the wildlife and elements to dispose of the rest given time.

Then there is the poor, which in India is a staggering percentage who wish to send off their loved ones traditionally but cannot afford the wood to burn or the monopolization of ghat fees. So, under cover of night, the body will be wrapped in colourful sarees and dhotis, weighted down, and simply placed into the river.

Here, just a short paddle to the other side, is a rural and dusty landscape, the opposite of the bustling township across the way.

On high tide, the current pulls the bodies, ashes and pollution down the Ganges, but as days and weeks pass, and water levels remain low, exposed is a vast plain of sand and bodies. Not just a few, but hundreds of remains, all at different stages of decomposition, still donning the bright garments in which they were laid to rest.

The Himalayas, NEPAL
The roof of the world.





The Marble Mountains, VIETNAM

Nestled high inside a mountain and hidden away from the blistering heat and bustling streets rests a timeless place where an atmosphere of wonder still exists.

Carved of stone and patience, back when we measured the days by light, its design illuminates a path of reflection to faith, the past and into ones self with the gentle tapping of raindrops and soft echos of wind providing the soundscape while incents garnish the air with hints of sandalwood and amber. The moments in-between of complete stillness enhance its simplistic beauty.

To linger is a fault only realised in retrospect, but here in a beacon of wonder, one would be unwise not to, as laying eyes upon its grandeur and hands across its stone, you connect with those who also have been encapsulated by this vision over hundreds of years, and in that, a connective tissue is momentarily felt, to our past and what questions we as humans have always pondered.

With last prayers whispered and final candles dimmed, the night inevitability consumes its radiance, beautiful yet unattainable to remain in; **best it keeps moving so we continue to chase its warmth.**



If you are doubtful, don't be. You'll arrive (eventually).
Step back from small annoyances; as they are just that.
Don't hinder on time just spent; soon enough, it will be rare.
Savour each spoonful, as many can only dream.
Use caution with sharp words as fast thoughts cut deep.
Different is no better or worse; it simply is.
Listen, everyone's story deserves respect.
Be kind; it may mean everything, most likely to a stranger.
Make peace, with yourself and others, as tomorrow is but a dream.
For the masterpiece it is, appreciate this life.

END



To my family, for the warmth when wheels land, and to all those that shared, if only brief, moments of your life.

THANK YOU



A COLLECTION OF IMAGES FROM OUR DIVERSE WORLD AND TALES FROM BEHIND THE LENS



JACOB VINCENT BALL

CONTRAST



PHOTOGRAPHY & STORIES
FROM THE ROAD



2013 TO 2023

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THE PHILIPPINES
NEW ZEALAND
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INDONESIA
MALAYSIA
THAILAND III
NEPAL & THE HIMALAYAS
INDIA
PAKISTAN
CAMBODIA
THAILAND IV
ALASKA & THE ARCTIC CIRCLE
HAWAII
VIETNAM
NEW ZEALAND II
VANUATU
MYANMAR
NEW ZEALAND III
LAOS
VIETNAM II
TASMANIA
VIETNAM III
EGYPT
LADAKH & LITTLE TIBET
AUSTRALIA

